The Lair of the Wendigo

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The Lair of the Wendigo

by DaliahSilva

Summary

Once upon a time, in the village Maryland. A Wendigo is born.

How did it come to be you ask?
Well, through love.
But why?
Well come along then....come along...
Let me show you...

Notes

This story is a bit of an out of the blue one for me. I tried to put it off until I do more work on my other stories, but it literally would not leave me alone. Wrote it soon after watching 'The Shape of Water' so definite influence there. If you don't like the whole man/beast relationship I suggest you don't read this, it will get explicit eventually.
As usual, I read a lot of Hannigram fics so if there are any similarities, I don't mean to copy you. This story is written of my own thoughts and ideas.
Comments and feedback are the food for writing. Please let me know what you think.
Trollers are not welcome.
I have edited this fic myself.

See the end of the work for more notes

Egg

It happened once upon a time...

A tale you can't quite define...

The birth of the Wendigo.

Chapter One: Egg

Once upon a time, in the village Maryland. A Wendigo is born.

How did it come to be you ask?

Well, through love.

But why?

Well come along then....come along...

Let me show you...

The true origins of Maryland village have long since been forgotten, and replaced with stories of a rich man's ultimate landed gift to his beloved. It is quite frankly, a remote village. Dreadfully cold in the winter, and to be frank, even in the summer. It sits on the outer rim of a massive wood. But since the recent appointment of Cade Purnell as Mayor, the remote village has begun to prosper and become well known, expanding its resources, trading, and dealings with other villages, and bigger towns, earning farmsteads of its own in the process. Maryland soon expands into the woods beside it, which ends up surrounding the village almost entirely.

The village in itself is like most villages in stories such as this. Quaint and rustic, but homey, and full of life. But also like most, it is shadowed by superstition, and the fear of monsters

lurking and attacking in the dark.

But that shall be further explained in good time.

Mayor Purnell is not a bad mayor. A steely eyed gentleman, with professional efficiency and a stiff back, he holds no regard for the personal afflictions of the village folk. He is harsh, but decently fair enough to garner the joint wariness and respect of the villagers, and avoid mutiny. It is his wife rather, a Mrs. Purnell, to whom most villagers care to avoid entirely. She has a lashing tongue and no mind for what she terms as 'nonsense'. Mrs. Purnell will run readily to her husband in a seconds notice with evidence of this misdeed and that. One of the annoying busybody hens of the town.

Whom you would call the 'second in command' is the gruff and enforcing man by the name of Mr. Jack Crawford, settling in as a type of 'sheriff' of the village. It is often said that his booming voice can be heard from over one side of the village to the other. An opposing figure to be sure, he has sent back home many a young rascal to tears, apologizing profusely to their folks for their rambunctiousness. But his is a kind type of gruffness, and his sense of duty and justice keep the village in line. A firm temperament very much balanced by his beautiful wife, the Mrs Bella Crawford. Elegant and filled to the brim with compassion, she can sooth even the worst hurt with a tiny smile. It is of no surprise then when I tell you that she is one of the best village nurses in the county. Seen often in attendance with a Dr. Donald Sutcliffe, the village healer.

Also at home in the village, is the lovely school teacher Miss Alana Bloom. The envy of every woman and the desire of every man there. Her raven hair frames a strong but delicate face and expressive eyes. She too has earnt the respect and good opinions of the village folk, despite being a full woman grown and still unmarried. Instead, she takes up vows to her student children, devoting much time and energy to them. Becoming a type of governess to the girls, and a second mother to the boys. Her education has been extensive, being the daughter of a distant Duke, so she is quite knowledgeable on most things. Often, it is a mystery as to why then she would settle down in such a quiet remote village, but it is never complained about nor discussed openly.

Ah, but with every village there is a dark spot, as is with every basket of fruit a rotten apple. This one is in the form of the village holy man. Mr Mason Verger. A true patron of the 'light and holiness'. In truth, he is a sour man, weedy and slick. His almost manic obsession with the faith he says he has gained from 'The Great City' beyond the village, self entitling him to ensure that his word is 'law'. He takes great pleasure in scaring the young and old alike on what awaits them in the fiery and tortured pains of the darkest hell, should they not listen to his holy words and followings. His favorite spoken sermon likens men to that of pigs, wallowing in their sinful swill. Most feel sorry for his quiet and secluded wife, Mrs. Margot Verger. Rarely seen, except at Sunday worship in the holy chapel, she too is often the topic of discussion as to how a man like Mr. Mason, has acquired her as his wife. Most surmise that it was due to an arranged marriage made in childhood, as some folks still do. All pity her. If Mr. Crawford is the man the children are wary of, Mr. Mason is the one they immediately scarper from upon sight. Mr. Mason especially seems to hold an instant dislike towards the young William Graham.

Now, we can happily introduce ourselves to the young boy with whom this story involves.

Let us first take a look at the young, slight boy of eight winters, with beautiful cerulean blue eyes and wild curly brown hair. Mr. William Graham, or Will as he is often called, is what one might identify as the unusual child. Nothing to note of at first glance, he has no outstanding deformities or learning impediments, besides being rather shy of personality, and yet quite mature for his age at the same time. It is some unknown sense, some strange inner gut feeling that makes Will the outcast of the village children, and therefore, shunned by most. A case of 'one of these things is not like the other, one of these things doesn't belong.' This of course, is quite unfair to the boy who is both an inquisitive and sharp mind, but also sweet in nature and accepting of all others. What does not help is his absent mother. Being motherless, an age old reason for torment and nasty teasing.

Will's mother had taken her own life shortly after his birth. Almost a century later, it would be understood that she had suffered from post-natal depression, but to this day and age, her death is instead gossiped about and explained by rumors. The true contributing factor was stress due to an alcoholic husband, judgmental village folk, and a very sensitive baby, the latter whom could be set off to cry constantly from every little outside influence. Some say she simply died of natural causes, that is the light rumor. Some say she had died due to the birth of Will, that is the bad rumor. Some whisper that Will's father had murdered her, that being the worst rumor.

Will's father is the village drunk, a Mr. Grant Graham. A rough and square jawed man. Incapable in truth, of murdering his wife, but often seen in an unpleasant manner, with a nightcap in his hand, and dogs surrounding his feet. His official job is the village huntsman, together with a Mr. Garett Jacob Hobbs. Abigail, Mr. Hobb's daughter, often plays with Will and remains to the very end, his best friend. Mr. Hobbs would often take Abigail with him when he went hunting for small game, or when checking the traps in the wood, much to Mrs. Hobbs chagrin. Abigail would in a few years, take up the job of huntsman together with her father, much to everyone's surprise at her skillful aptitude in hunting. Still an unheard of thing among woman folk. Will sometimes goes with them into the woods. Though not by the invitation of his own father. Will's intellect in his youth ensuring his partiality to books and learning, rather than 'men's work'. Which results in his fathers rude negligence. Things improved slightly only when it was discovered that Will had a penchant for the dogs. The dogs aiding Mr. Graham and Mr. Hobbs in hunting and tracking, and it was soon discovered that they obeyed Will more often than Mr. Graham. Will is often seen crouched down and rough housing with them, though one soft spoken word has them at heel, following after him like little chicks. Still rather neglectful, Mr. Graham's sole bond with his son involves teaching Will how to fix things and train dogs. But Will is hardly bereft from it. It is preferable to the cursing and drunken beatings Mr. Graham dolls out here and there.

But have no fear, Will's life is not all bleak. As well as his dogs he has his friends. A small group, but as solid as any childhood friendships could be. There is the sweet Molly. A jolly girl, plump in her youth, and the daughter of the herb sellers Mr. and Mrs. Foster. Then besides the opinionated Abigail, there are also the twins, Brian and Jimmy. Though not the same physically, they are what one would call identically different. In one sentence they can both argue with each other and agree, finishing each others sentences back and forth. It is both a great source of amusement and annoyance to the group. Their mother, Mrs. Beverley

Katz, is the sum of all mothers. Both caring with one hand, and ready to scold and cuff a disobedient child with the other. Will is treated all the same as her own two troublemakers, and has many a cuff off of Mrs. Katz, or Mam Bev as she is called, to his name. Mam Bev also has a penchant for baking and experimentation, to the exasperation of a very tolerant Mr. Katz. It became a game of the children to try out a new creation of Mam Bev's, on a percentage of fifty fifty that it would be inedible. Now if Mam Bev is his mother guide, Mrs. Crawford is his mother hen. Having no children of her own under suspect of the curse of a barren womb, she dotes on Will fondly. Soothing his tears made from other kids, fixing his hurts, and making sure he has proper fitting clothes and shoes for every season. Just from walking towards her she can tell if he needs new....ah hem...unmentionables....

Suffice to say Will's life, despite his rough birth parentage, is a decent one.

But we all know life has a habit of shaking apart the decent and good.

We move back now to the wood surrounding the village.

Wolf Trap Wood.

Why Wolf Trap Wood you ask? Well, because of the wolves.

Soon after the village expands further into the wood rather than rest on the rim of it, wolves start to attack livestock and are a threat to the children. So the fearless huntsmen Mr. Graham and Mr. Hobbs, lay traps all around the village to keep the wolves out. Hence the namesake originates. A new trade also arises in the escorting of the villagers needing to enter the wood to gather supplies, like the herb gatherers, and others needing to leave the village through the wood by the dirt road, and travel to the nearest town stead three kilometers away for trade. So Mr. Graham starts to breed more dogs and is made escort of the villagers, which suits him well. He can drink while the dogs make sure all is well, and warn him of any threat approaching. The only present Mr. Graham ever give his son is a small puppy mutt, bred for Will to train as his main companion. Will names him Winston after a story he once read in a book.

Will, like much of the other children likes to play 'chicken' on the woods edge. Turning their backs to it in excited fear, and seeing who can last the longest in a test of true childhood bravery. Abigail knows the wood and its dangers within, and is rather good at the game. But Will is the best. For some reason unknown he is never afraid of the wood, nor what it can contain, all manner of dark beasts and monsters of folklore. Besides, logically speaking Winston is usually with him, and Will knows even as a young pup Winston will alert him to any happenings.

Will often feels sorry for the wolves in the wood. In his young yet perceptive mind, he recognizes the villages unwarranted intrusion into their natural home. He tries to not let his feelings show but is sometimes noticed and teased at by the other children. One time, he is roughly scolded at by his father when he sheds silent tears upon seeing his first dead wolf caught in a trap. No one else seems to offer much compassion to these creatures, seen only as a threat. Only Mr. Hobbs offers any soothing to Will's emotions.

“We will honor every part of him Will,” Mr. Hobbs says to the boy, a comforting hand on his slim little shoulder, smartly ignoring the tear tracks down innocent cheeks. “Nothing will go to waste, I promise you. His sacrifice is not in vain.” Will understands, and although he still feels bad about it, he has been comforted in the notion that it doesn't seem to be too much of a needless death. After all, one must protect oneself and survive. Mr. Hobbs surprises the boy again a few days later, gifting the boy a leather necklace with two wolf canine teeth attached, and a small paper wrapped pack of wolf jerky. “Now you can carry him with you always inside and out.” Mr. Hobbs informs young Will. Other villagers who spy the exchange are slightly alarmed by this, but make no effort to interfere. Will is after all, the unusual child. Will, never by his own accord will remove the necklace he puts on that day. The jerky he enjoys immensely, sharing it with Winston and the other dogs. It seems suitable.

And so life in Maryland grows and prospers. Yet one day, during one of the most coldest of winters, power shifts. The wolf traps become empty, hunts showing dwindling traces of them until no proof of their existence remains. This in itself, is not a great cause of alarm as of yet. Villagers explain away their absence ignorantly. Most blaming the winter weather, though it never truly stopped the wolves before. Soon after, the huntsmen find a large dead carcass of a stag, ripped apart and almost vanished in half. The creature that has killed it clearly no wolf pack, nor the injuries made by any animal markings they have ever seen before. A dead boar carcass follows the stag, and other signs of a vicious and deadly animal are seen. Wolf Trap Wood itself grows darker and darker, something deep within making its presence known. A swelling roll of strength. The village draws in a hush, talks of a large hunting party are arranged to seek out the creature. Mr. Graham is particularly nervous and loud at home, much to young Will's detriment, forced to spend nights up on the house roof to escape drunken attacks. The day the party is set to move out, they discover with fear that during the night, silent as death, all of the hidden wolf traps have been triggered and destroyed into shattered bits.

All the traps.

The hunting party remains home that evening.

Now we must remind ourselves that despite its prospering existence this is a village, with simple folk, living out their lives without any questions of the universe, and how it works yet. So being faced with this unknown creature, intelligent and deadly, sends the village into sheer panic. It is all Mayor Purnell and Mr. Crawford can do to keep the community in calm. Reassured the creature only takes from the wood, double guards and look outs are arranged, and life goes on, abet more cautiously than before. A season later, a small group of seven walks along the dirt road to the nearby town to trade cow and sheep pelts. Mr. Graham does not join them as escort. The bigger group thinking themselves protection enough from the wild animals and enemy renegades, while on a dirt road familiarly traveled. One week later they still have not returned. Mayor Purnell sends Mr. Crawford, Mr. Graham, Mr. Hobbs, and 3 other brave burly men of the village to walk the road and find out where the wayward party have gone.

But no trace can be found in town nor on the road. Mr. Graham's dogs are on edge, constantly growling at the tree line of the wood, their fur ruffled and agitated. On the way back to the village the group of dogs stop at one point and bark. Bravely, Mr. Crawford ventures a little

into the wood. Now, we remind you again that Mr. Crawford is as brave a man as they come, but even he turns death pale at the sight before him. One of the lost village men lie dead in the wood grass, hidden by foliage, and with an empty cavern in his torso where his organs used to be. Clearly not a victim of renegades or thieves, but of horror and something beyond imagination. Further in, another of the original party of seven is found. Bloodied all the same, but missing a whole leg. Blood trails lead further into the wood, but the group have seen enough. The dreaded creature has attacked them. Soon enough, other attacks occur on those entering Wolf Trap Wood, horrific but very real, as are more attacks on those attempting to travel the long dirt path to town. Mr. Graham's dogs seem to deter attacks for the most part, but they still happen. Mr. Stammets, the graveyard keeper, suddenly has more work to occupy his days and fill his pockets.

The village is in an uproar. Nothing can sooth them as they cry out to the skies, to signal their end of days. This just simply does not happen to such a quaint and prospering village. Lucky however, they have a rather practical Mayor. Together, whispering with Mr. Mason and Mr. Crawford, one night all the adults of the village meet and devise a plan.

In what would have been considered a drastic and massive undertaking back in the day, The Wall is built.

A tall structure a full two houses high, made of metal and wood from Wolf Trap Wood itself, it surrounds the village and accompanying small fields completely. Supervised by Mr. Mason, old symbols of ancient runes and angelic symbols of holiness are painted all along the wall. Just inside, two watch towers, one at each end of the village, hold lookouts that shift watch every hour of every day, and guard the only two gates and ways in and out of the village. In addition, Mr. Graham breeds more dogs, small and large, now having a pack of ten, all trained to hunt and kill and protect. Thus the simple village of Maryland now lives in constant fear of the supernatural creature that preys on it and its people. Adults whisper to children late at night, unwilling to sleep, that the creature of terrible legend will get them.

The creature will eat them all up.

Will is not truly afraid though. Even never having spotted the creature itself, Will still, as much as he is able to without getting caught, slips through a gap finds one day in The Wall and sits there watching Wolf Trap Wood. Often, he can feel as if there are eyes that watch him from the dark. Will wants to be afraid like the other children, that would make sense. But all he feels as he sits there with his back to the wall of wood and metal, and eyes to the trees, is peace, and a great loneliness.

Then one day Mr. Graham comes home shaken and bloodied. The dogs corralled outside strangely silent. Mr. Graham lives in a small hutch, with Will. The whole hutch, one whole room divided into sections for cooking, sleeping, and a fireplace in front of a soft fur seating. Will, thinking his father has been in another brawl, goes immediately to fetch the water basin and hot water to help clean his father up. Mr. Graham flops with exhaustion onto the seating by the fire Will has built just a few minutes ago. His eyes are open and frozen in memory. Large claw marked wounds are cleaned, more visible by Will with each swipe of the warm cloth. A sharp pain at the cleansed injury makes Mr. Graham jump up with a growl and push the boy hard to sprawl about the floor. Moving away he brings back his bottle of whisky and

sits down again, taking a big gulp. To his son, he gives a short nod for the boy to continue in his cleansing, and the only form of apology Will will ever get. As Will once more cleans up his father, his tiny voice breaks the silence beyond the sound of the crackling fire.

“What happened father?”

Mr. Graham grunts. In a gruff voice long made husky by drink he mutters. “The creature attacked again. More and more it hunts us and makes mice of us all.”

In a fit of anger caused by the pride of a man not wanting to be so scared nor victimised, he kicks the bowl of now bloodied water to spill and skid across the floor upended. Will looks to the bowl and then to his father with alarm. For a moment, neither boy nor man move. Mr. Graham takes another long swill of whisky.

“We saw the creature this time. It killed Bentley when he tried to warn us of its presence, but we saw, we saw its monstrous form.” Mr. Graham's voice turns to a whisper and the fire in the fireplace flickers. “It looks like the devil itself, we were lucky to escape, if not for Bentley. Three men were bloodied, two Dr. Sutcliffe does not think will make it through the night.”

Will's eyes widen in alarm and a strange burning case of curiosity. Who is this creature that would attack the men and women of the village but leave Will sitting outside The Wall without protection for hours? Is it because he is yet still a boy of now ten winters? Will reaches up to grip his wolf teeth necklace.

“Miss Bloom tells us it is a creature of myth.”

Mr. Graham snorts viciously and swigs another gulp of whisky, drowning himself in burning amber.

“Miss. Bloom buries her head in too many books boy. A creature that kills is a creature of blood and bone. Yet it is the devil itself come to test our courage and try us for fools.”

Will is now very curious at this creature.

“What did it look like father?”

Mr. Graham pauses, his lips sneers. “It looked like a black shadow with long claws and fangs, but it looks like a man, sees like a man, it knows how to move.” Mr. Graham stops, as if realizing just how far fetched a description he just gave to his son.

“So it could be a man?” Will cannot help but ask, his inquisitive mind working and moving, absorbing whatever he can get.

Mr. Graham snorts. Will, caught up in the moment and foolishly foregoing his usual caution surrounding his opinions, can't stop himself when he adds “I think in a way we deserve to be attacked. It is a creature of the wood as Miss. Bloom tells us, and like the wolves, we go into it's home and disturb it. It might only be attacking us because it is scared of us and wants to protect itself.”

Mr. Graham's face turns bright red. He only just stops himself from striking his child. He is not a man used to being uncomfortable with things not solid and straight forward, or things out of his power. With a firm temper he looks down at his son, so unlike him in thoughts and mind, with his mothers bright blue eyes, and holds a finger inches from the boys face. He is displeased greatly that his son would think the creature has any feelings at all. Fear making him angry. “So you think that we deserve its attacks?!? You think all those in the village that have died ripped apart by this creature deserve its wrath?!? You are a stupid and ungrateful little boy and deserve to be fed to the creature yourself for such thinking!! Maybe I should have made you come with us, and gave the creature you instead of allowing Bentley to be harmed. At least the dogs have purpose” Mr. Graham snarls down at his son. “ It is a creature that kills mindlessly, an abomination of the good like Mr. Mason tells us. So unless you want the same fate as the dead, NEVER go outside the The Wall boy! NEVER play those little stupid games with the other children, or sneak off with Mr. Hobbs and his wretched daughter, and NEVER go near the wood! Do you understand me boy? Or do you too want to be found ripped open, dead and sad and alone?”

Will's eyes widen, not at the gruesome image his father paints but at the sheer anger in his father, which has always put him on edge.

“No father, I won't go outside of The Wall father.” He responds quietly and obediently.

“Clean up this mess you made and go to bed.” Mr. Graham groans as he gets up, and grumbling without another eligible word to his son, wanders off to his bed in the far corner of the hutch, a curtain separating it for privacy to sleep. His whisky bottle still clutched between his fingers. Will knows he will be sound asleep soon. Will cleans up the mess left on the wooden floor, but does not make any move towards his own sleeping quarters. A small but comfy pallet, located up a ladder in the loft of the hutch. Instead, he sits down on one of the cows furs on the floor in front of the fireplace and watches the fire die down to glowing warn embers, waiting for his father to falls into the deep sleep of the drunken.

He has to know, he has to see.

When his fathers snores grow to a loud pitch, and the whisky bottle falls to the floor with a thunk, spilling its contents, Will quickly and quietly fetches his boots and a warm but threadbare coat, and slips outside into the cold of the night. Walking away from the hutch, Winston appears at his side, silently following and padding along as always. Will looks to the dogs sitting beside the hutch under the small wooden covering Will made for them to keep off the rain and some of the elements. He is quite sorry to hear of Bentley's death. One of the larger dogs bred, he has done his duty and served his purpose, yet Will still feels bad for the dogs passing. His father is right in a way, as Bentley did not deserve to die protecting them from the enemies the village has provoked.... and Will DID think they have provoked the creature, no matter what his father says. Moving along the path, slipping by other cottages, huts, and the sleeping occupants inside, Will moves with purpose and familiarity to his spot on The Wall. As Will walks, he looks up at the moon, so white and silver. Will is not afraid of the night, part childish recklessness, and part comfortable familiarity, he knows the night is not an enemy but rather a natural state. The only danger is the unknown hiding in the night. But if one understands the night and what can hide in it, one does not fear the night anymore. Will has spent much time at night, escaping his fathers anger, and would in the past, when the

creature had not yet appeared, climb a tree at the woods edge, and watch the shadows play above and around, through the branches lit by the moonlight. Colour drains from the world in the night, making some things look very black.

As he reaches his destination, yet again undetected. He quietly whispers Winston to stay. Though Will would happily risk himself, he would never risk his beloved pet being attacked, not even by accident. Hidden in the blind spot between the two watchtowers, a wooden panel can be moved aside slightly, and there be a gap in the metal wiring for Will to slip through. Will moves aside the loose wooden panel and slips through, the view of Wolf Trap Wood treeline greeting him, tall, dark, and foreboding as usual. The same as any night. Will has always been drawn to the wood, which is why he always goes back, even after The Wall was built, and despite the threat of the creature. Seeing nothing unusual, and watching carefully, aware of the recent attack by the creature. Will moves just next to the panel opening, facing the wood in his usual spot. His hands move to a decent sized oil wrapped cloth covering, hidden under dirt from previous visits, and slowly unrolls it now, spreading the clean side to face up and out of the earth.

Will sits.

He gives a sigh and is at peace, listening to the sounds of the night animals in Wolf Trap Wood. It is only here at this time, in the dark of the night Will feels most like he belongs. He knows he is disobeying his father and will get punished most harshly if found, especially given that he has let go unfixed a gap in the protective fence. But Will has always felt out of place in the village. Always feeling as if he is wanted for more in life. Always just on the edge of civilization. He speaks and moves and behaves but not because he wishes to. Often the face he shows to even his friends is the face of the Will he knows his friends want to see. But there is a hidden darkness inside of him that he dares not let out. That darkness finds beauty in things most others would fear or avoid. Like Wolf Trap Wood, and all it contains. Even the creature that now lurks and threatens from the dark. In some foolish naive way, Will had hoped the creature would show itself to him. But as time goes by there is no smell, nor sight, nor sound that indicates the creature is there. And although Will would gladly risk the creature up against The Wall, he is not stupid enough to venture into the wood on his own. Other things can kill him just as well, if not more assuredly than the creature. An accidental trip perhaps to hinder him, poisoned plants, and others animals such as boars. For once since he started his escapades here, Will's trip to The Wall has not soothed him. Instead, he feels more alone than ever. He wonders if the creature too feels alone, after all there has only ever been evidence of one creature killing, not two. To be the only one of it's kind must be very lonely, and that feeling suddenly fills Will to the brim.

Melancholy now, and starting to get very cold sitting on the night ground, Will stretches and yawns. Shifting to put his back to the wood and crouching to roll back up his cloth, he senses a slight shift in the air behind him. Freezing still, he makes no more moves nor breathes, as he hears just at the tip of his hearing, a slight rustling of leaves. This in itself is not a wonder, but there is no breeze tonight, and no need for rustling. All of a sudden, overcome by fear of his situation like he has not had before, Will spins on his heels and lands awkwardly on his bottom, eyes frantically searching the treeline, breath in gasps.

There.

Almost at the edge.

Hidden behind a tree and large bush.

A set of golden eyes.

At first Will tries to excuse the eyes away. It is only an animal, not worth much fear. He should quickly retreat inside The Wall and be safe once more. But as his night vision focuses on the tree, it becomes clear that this is no animal like he has ever seen nor looked at in the pictures of books. A white coloured shape takes slight form and seems to be almost glowing. Will breath is labored and loud as the thing slowly comes up out of the protection of the wood around it. Will's eyes blow wide at the sight. His mouth dropping open in shock, nostrils flaring.

The creature is small, slightly smaller than Will himself, and much similar to the description his father gave him before in the hutch. It looks human like in appearance, much like that of a child. Skin the colour of white cream, it seems almost ghost like in the moonlight. But for a faint shimmering of gold through its naked skin. It looks sexless but Will has a feeling that it is a girl. Slightly chubby and round with the full cherub appearance of a baby, its bright baby blue eyes assess Will with childlike curiosity. Head tilted to the side just so, a head that to Will's even more shocked surprise, is sprouted by two small horns. Curving and elegant, other small tips sprouting shortly from it like miniature stag horns.

Will cannot move.

Neither more can the creature.

Will starts suddenly as the creature lets out a small chirp, much akin to a baby bird. It sounds inquisitive and shy. Will slowly starts to relax. He can sense no danger nor threat from this creature. Before he can help himself, his mouth moves into a small smile. The creature seems to perk up at his expression, and moves out a little bit more away from the tree, a tinkling noise filling the air.

Will thinks this simply cannot be the creature that has been killing the village folk. It seems more like a little angel of holy stories than a blood thirsty vicious creature of the dark. Was this the creature that he has felt watching him during his visits to The Wall? The creatures eyes on him feel like the sticky innocent fingers of the young babies of the village. For some reason Will does not think this is his watcher. Just as he is about to shift up on his knees and open his mouth to speak to it, the air shifts. A sudden oppressing weight fills the wood, and the trees bend. Suddenly, a deep low gong like hum fills the air, and all the hairs on Will's body stand on end at the sound. Fear, thick and clogging fills his veins, which resonates from deep inside Wolf Trap Wood. Will knows without a doubt that this is the creature they have all come to fear. At the noise however, the little white creature spins its head into the direction of the wood, and with one last glance back at Will, dashes off into the direction of its sound. All at once Wolf Trap Wood seems to sigh in relief, and the air breaths again, soothing and twinkling under the stars of another perfect clear night. All as if nothing has occurred before it.

Will has not moved.

He can feel the pain in his bottom cheek from were he landed when he spun, and the cold of the night, chilly now on his fear wet skin. But he can no longer see the little white creature. He feels undone, battered, his mind in chaos. However, he knows he cannot stay outside The Wall for very much longer. So he turns and abandons his cloth unrolled, and with every sense aware to every noise and scent of the wood behind him, scurries back through the gap in The Wall, and secures it behind him. There he stands and stares at where he has come through, unblinking and anxious. Winston pulls him out of his stupor and licks his hand, sensing the distress his master is in. Shaking himself, Will proceeds back to his hutch, hand clutching the fur of Winston's back for comfort and safety. He doesn't stop until he is up in his loft and under the blankets of his bed, still fully clothed. His mind is still going over what he had just seen and heard. It replays over and over as the realistic memory of it wrestles with his logical mind for dominance. Some details turn hazy despite his attempt to seize and keep them clear, and it feels as if he has just imagined the whole thing.

Did it really happen? Did he just see a creature of the wood? Did he just hear the terrifying sound of the truest and darkest of creatures? His brain feels fit to collapse, and if it wasn't for the fact that he still has his boots and coat on he would push away what has happened as fantasy. Instead he swallows deep, and digs under the blankets, listening to his breathing slowly even out until he slips down into the quiet of sleep.

**

The next morning Will's head is clear again, and all seems right in the world. His father, he can hear moving and stumbling about in his after drink sickness. Mr. Graham only gives a loud shout up to Will of “Get your butt to school boy!” before he stumbles out, and Will can hear him corral the dogs up for the days work. Only then does Will flip off the blankets and scale down the ladder. Seeing no edible food besides moldy bread and fruit, he resigns himself to an empty breakfast until lunch. Pouring water into a wooden bowl he undresses gives himself a quick wash, rubbing his face and underarms, before changing into clean clothes and goes outside. Winston greets him, and he crouches down to pat his loyal companion. On the way through the village, he begs a scrap of meat for Winston from the village butcher, a Mr. Cordell. He doesn't like the way Mr. Cordell smiles, but has no objection to him allowing Will some scraps to feed to Winston as a treat.

Will's day goes by as usual. He likes school, and Miss. Bloom is always kind to him and teaches them different things every day. At some point, he is being a little more subdued as usual, because he catches her staring at him in a strange considering way. But children have a skill in concentrating on one event at a time, completely forgetting what came before. He talks with sweet Molly, and admires the new bone necklace Abigail shows him that Mr. Hobbs made for her. He plays and rough houses with Brian and Jimmy, screaming defeat and calling foul when Brian holds his arms behind him, and Jimmy tickles him to submission. They share their extra lunch with him that Mam Bev packed, as always. He tries to stay out of the way and not lose his temper when Francis and Randall come to mock and harass him. Mr. Mason's children are mean through and through. Francis Verger tends to be upfront and

high and mighty about things, just like his father. His opinion being law. Randall Verger is quieter and all the more frightening. Randall would wait like a predator and attack when one least expects it. Will has seen him often pulling the wings off flies and stepping on ants and bugs on purpose. After the two bullies, there is Franklin, a round tubby boy of the cheese and butter makers. He always needs to bathe more, as his skin reeks of the cheese his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Froideveroux make. But he is harmless enough, and often tries to follow Tobias around. Tobias is the child of the woodworkers, Mr. and Mrs. Budge. Tall and solemn, he is usually seen practicing on the beautiful violin his parents saved and saved to buy and make for him. Will never really talks to Tobias much, and that seems to suit the two of them fine. The last of the children in his acquaintance are the twins Freddie and Frederica. Nosy busybody gossipers who talk over others and each other, and whom always begins a sentence with the words “Well I heard....”. Will is surprised their tongues haven't twisted in on themselves from all the lies that can sprout from their mouths.

After school has ended and he and his friends part, Will walks to the Crawford's house. Mr. Crawford is still out working, but Mrs. Crawford greets him as usual, with warm food and tasty cakes. She also envelops him in her hugs whenever she can. Will doesn't mind, he is hungry and in need of a little attention. If she notices his strange behavior today, she does not mention it. Instead giving him a piece of sweet toffee to take home. Mr. Crawford has just reached the house, as Will leaves. He seems frustrated and irked as usual, but still pats Will's head as he passes and says “Good lad.” Will rubs his head in subconscious reaction and heads home, belly full. He plays outside with Winston a little, taking him through his paces in training. He enters his house, with no fire lit and Mr. Graham still not returned. Will lights a fire and watches it burn.

He cannot ignore the gnawing pit in his stomach much longer, not as the sun starts to set. It is not hunger that makes him nauseous. Everything from the night before comes back to him. Will closes his eyes and in his imaginative mind, the past goes back and back further. A golden light swiping away the current events of the day, until he can see his interaction with the little white creature clear in his mind, as if he is right there that same night, living it all again. Each speck of information ready to decode and sort in his head. Will is most certain that this little white creature is not responsible for the killings of the village. That responsibility is most likely the fault of the creature who made that terrifying sound at the end. Will is surprised that no one in the village has noticed the little white one before. It seems to know of the other darker creature, for it did not run from the heard noise in fright, but rather towards it as if caught. Much like a child immediately runs to his mother when she calls for them. Will can see that the little white creature is not thin nor seems hungry. It would make sense that the other more deadly creature feeds the littler one.

He shouldn't, but he wants to go back tonight and perhaps see the little white creature again. He will have to be wary though, of the other one. Adrenaline, mischief, and youthful rebellion garner his choice. Will will go back to the fence tonight. He needs to roll back up his oil cloth anyway, or risk it being there clear to see when the next watch goes to check all around The Wall. He goes to bed early to avoid Mr. Graham as he stumbles back to the hutch late that night. He smells dreadful, and Will winces in disgust at the stench of clogging perfume that follows behind him like a sad note in the air. Only widow Mrs. Bedelia Du Maurier has that perfume. An elegant lady, but worn very down by life. She was married to a rich tradesman who had an unfortunate accident while at sea, delivering his merchandise. He

lost his leg, which festered, and was dead before they reached shore. Unfortunately that did not leave Mrs. Du Maurier with much, and she was forced to sell most of what she owned to afford a modest living with no husband. Now, she stays in Maryland village and is known for her persuasion in getting what she wants, either by tongue or beauty. Will has never really spoken with her, and he does not hold grudge against his father's visits with her. But her perfume makes him sneeze.

Once he hears again the telltale snoring of his father, Will sneaks out of the house. The familiar travel to The Wall puts him at ease, as does the always present Winston. But when Will reaches The Wall and slips through his gap, he first takes a moment to scan the trees.

There is nothing he can sense. He turns to pick up his oil cloth and freezes much like the night before.

His oil cloth is not there.

Slightly panicked, he looks around and ruffles through the dirt and piled rotting leaves in search, but it is gone. It is unlikely that any villages have been around to find it. His father would have told him if the dogs found anything, and he is sure that no one would be outside of The Wall tonight. All patrols outside The Wall are not done without the proper send off of prayers spoken, blessings given, and a great amount of impending fear. Will can only come to one conclusion.

The little white creature has returned and taken it.

Why it would do such Will has no clue, but it is the only explanation available.

Will puts his back to the fence and crouches down to make himself a smaller target, his eyes to the treeline. Nothing but the night life greets him. He remains alert and watchful for as long as he can, but concedes defeat when he almost falls from fatigue, and his legs shake from cramping burning pain. The little white creature does not show that night.

For the next three nights Will goes back to his spot and watches, waiting for the little white creature to show. Waiting for any indication. He is stubborn in not letting go of the happenstance with it, and refuses to dismiss it all as a dream and move on. Will starts to behave quite irritably from lack of sleep and frustration at not seeing the little white creature. Miss. Bloom teases at his tired black ringed eyes, and Mrs. Crawford fusses over him, asking what may be wrong. But Will cannot give an answer. She would be most alarmed if she knew what he was doing. Things come to a head when in his tired ire he speaks harshly and snaps at sweet Molly when she inquires after his well being. He immediately feels deep regret but the damage is done. Molly's eyes tear and she sniffles. Brain narrows his eyes at Will, and scolds him, taking Molly by the shoulders away. Jimmy seems torn but eventually follows after his brother. Only Abigail stays. She seems to accept his frustration for they skip school for the rest of the afternoon to play with the dogs, and sneak into Mr. Hobbs hunting cabin to gawk at his weapons. Big, sharp objects, each with a purpose that Abigail explains to him. Will asks her how he can make amends with Molly, but Abigail is the next closest thing to unusual after him, and has no clue. He asks Mrs. Crawford that evening and she smiles at him indulgently, stroking a curl back from his forehead, and cupping his cheek.

“Oh my, what a devil you are William.” She mocks “But a sweet boy to not be proud enough to not ask advice when needed. I can only suggest a bunch of flowers for sweet Molly, as well as an apology.”

“Flowers?” Will asks, wrinkling his nose.

Mrs. Crawford laughs happily at Will 's expression. “Yes. Flowers my child. There is not a girl in the village who would not want a pretty bunch of flowers given to her by a pretty boy.”

“And you Mrs. Crawford?” Will can't help but ask back cheekily.

“Oh you little horror! Yes. Me too” Mrs. Crawford laughs, shaking a slim finger at him. “Mr. Crawford has spent many a day picking flowers to help sooth my anger.”

Picturing such a gruff large man as Mr. Crawford picking out colourful little flowers has Will laughing out loud with Mrs. Crawford. But it is a good idea, and Will knows The Wall and the many flowers that grow by it. It is only as he is picking, that he comes up with an idea. Moving around The Wall, he plucks some extra flowers, this time not in pinks, or whites, or yellows, but in reds and greens, unusual flowers strangely shaped and wild. This he bundles and drops off hidden by his spot inside The Wall. The others he gathers with a pretty ribbon, aided to him by Mrs. Crawford, and goes on to find Molly. Molly is a little startled and wary by his approach, but is soon smiles and laughter again at his offering. Even going so far as to give him a hug. Jimmy and Abigail tease him for his actions, but are happy all is well in the group again. Brain teases too, but Will notices him looking a little disgruntled.

That night Will does as before, but does not linger to wait by The Wall. Instead, he places the flowers where his oil cloth once laid, and slips back immediately. He walks back home and goes to sleep.

The next morning Will wakes excited. Barely able to stop himself from going to check, time could not pass slower for him that day. When asked about his excitement and impatience he merely shrugs. Time passing is torturous. But when finally that night, Mr. Graham comes home and to bed, Will slips away once more.

What awaits Will makes him want to cry out to the night sky in joy.

The flowers are gone.

**

We skip forward in time now to a Will of twelve winters in age. He has grown taller, and his face more defined, losing much of the puppy fat of youth. He has begun showing great proficiency in fishing, and in training the dogs. The latter task is left to Will now rather than Mr. Graham, who has fallen much more into the bottle. Will gains great joy training them. But it seems the older Will gets the more arguments arise between him and Mr. Graham.

They avoid each other for the most part. Will still goes to Mrs. Crawford's to eat and for advice. Especially when concerning sweet Molly, who has begun to take quite a shine to him. Often, Will brings back fish to Mrs. Crawford, or small game caught by the dogs.

But every few nights, Will still walks to his spot outside The Wall. Not as often as in the past, but regular enough. He has yet to really see the little white creature again, though he has extended his movement to place his gifts, either flowers, handmade colourful lures toys, or sweet treats, on the treeline instead of by The Wall. Will hoped that his bravery will encourage interaction, but it seems to have had the opposite effect. Making his way slowly to the treeline, Will waited until his nerves and wakefulness gave out for the little white creature to show. The next night his offering hadn't been taken. It was only two nights later his gift disappeared. After trying a few times with the same result, Will resigned himself to the realization that he might never see the little white creature again. This seemed true, as the only other time he spied it on his visits was due to random happenstance. Will had placed his gift as usual and not staying that night, stepped through the gap, but had turned in the last second in a sudden impulse to look back at his gift. It was then that he saw the small hand, arm, and upper body of the little white creature reach out from behind a bush to grab his gift. The rare sight encouraged Will and gave him hope, though he was smart enough to not try and do the same thing again. He still sits by The Wall sometimes, though he has had to make the gap in The Wall just a little bit bigger now to accommodate him. Watching the treeline, and being enveloped in the wonders of the night, still soothes him. Though he always feels as if he is being watched. A heavy weight of a look, like a prickle at the back of ones neck. Whether it was the little white creature or the other one who's noise Will still can't forget, he is not sure. Survival instincts make him hope it was the former than the latter. Will never forgets that the other creature is there, hiding deep in Wolf Trap Wood.

The creature has not stopped killing. Always a threat to the village, looming and deadly. Knowing that it is connected to the sweet little white creature gives Will no real comfort. Not when he sees the damage it does to both animal and human alike. Hunting parties and strong men have grouped together from the nearby town to help find and kill the creature, but to no avail. Most do not come back, others come back wounded permanently or practically on deaths door. Any traps laid are intelligently destroyed. More and more rumors and whispers are circulated. The creature is not of this world. The elders in the town suggest the village disperse. The town mayor offering shelter and a new life to all the folk of Maryland village if they leave. Major Purnell refuses to give up Maryland village. Although some villagers do leave, they leave with only blessings and good fortune for a new life. Life at Maryland village continues on unperturbed but for their creature.

However, fate can be cruel, and this would not be the tale it is if not for the circumstance that happened next.

Will knew that his little gap in the fence would not remain unseen and unchecked for long. Major Purnell called for a check over all of The Wall, to see if it can be improved, or even expanded upon, thinking all safe within its structure. Late one evening, when Will was happily walking back to the hutch after a big hot meal with Mrs. Crawford. A villager was walking around the inside of The Wall, checking its stability. To his fright and surprise, he noticed a slight wobble in a panel when he banged against it with his fist. Noting it in his mind to report back, he reassured himself that the structure around it was still firm and

strong, and that the small gap wasn't enough to let the creature through. All knew the creature to be tall and large. Still not willing to take too much of a risk upon hearing it, Mayor Purnell quickly arranges a group of men together with Mr. Graham and the dogs, to guard Mr. and Mrs. Budge as they fix The Wall early the next morning. For once, no announcement is made due to Mayor Purnell not wanting to alarm the village for so small a matter as a loose paneling. That night, Will decides to leave the little white creature a bit of sweet toffee, given to him by Mrs. Crawford that evening. He goes to bed later that night content and happy.

About an hour before the sun will start to peek up over the horizon, the little white creature swiftly moves through the wood, skipping and dancing merrily to the spot near the big flat wide wooden tree. The tree circles around the place of the 'humans', or so her brother tells her. She hopes the strange creature with fluff on its head has left her something, she does so enjoy what it leaves her. Chirping happily when the tiny package is spotted like always, she forgoes the usual check around for humans. There is never anyone there, just the strange creature with pink skin, that leaves her things. Her brother has forbade her to go near the creature and the flat wide tree. When he caught her the first time, as she was about to speak to the strange creature, he was furious. They are dangerous, he told her. Would kill her if they found her. She asked why he kills them then. Her brother told her it is because he is strong, a bigger predator than the pathetic things hiding behind the big flat tree. They are nothing more than the swine that roll around in the muddy parts of the wood. But even swine have boars, and boars have sharp horns if not careful. She does not think that the other strange creature would hurt her, but she obeys her brother nonetheless and keeps unseen. However, she cannot stop herself from returning every while for her gifts. She picks up the tiny package now, making a happy high note at the sight of the sticky sweet stuff inside which she pops into her mouth immediately and chews, now in full view from the treeline.

Unknown to her, a party of men together with Mr. Crawford, Mr. Graham, and Mr. and Mrs. Budge make their way to the spot on The Wall the guard had reported about, torches flaring, weapons at the ready. They are comforted by the fact that dawn will arrive soon …. a silly protective superstition, and that they have enough men to quickly fix The Wall and retreat home. As they move around The Wall the dogs start to bark and growl, rushing forward, all in attack. The little white creature hears the dogs and freezes in terror. She knows with dread that she has made a very bad mistake. She makes a slightly worse one in crying out in fear, instead of quickly moving back into the wood in silence. Her call resonates her location and is similar to that of a young pup caterwauling for their mother.

Turning too late to rush back into the wood. The dogs come upon her.

One of the bigger ones trained to attack, grabs hold of her arm as she squeals in pain. The rest circling her growling. The party of men soon come upon her and the frenzy begins. Shocked at seeing the creature, fear making them strike out, strike out before they themselves are attacked. It matters not that the creature is small, it matters not that it does to match the description previously feared and given of a taller, black creature with deadly claws, it only matters that they kill this creature before them. This creature so unlike them in appearance. Humanity has never had a good record with acceptance of that different from themselves.

Wolf Trap Wood and Maryland village is filled with the sounds of angry, frantic calls.

“ATTACK! KILL THE CREATURE!!!! KILL IT QUICKLY!!!!”, the dogs snarling and barking, and the sad painful wails of the little white creature. She is not like her brother, having no big talons and fangs yet to rip and protect, the horns on its head still soft and curved. Creatures such as this can last thousands of years and age slowly.

But sadly, the little white creature is young, and not yet strong enough.

In the village, Will is already awake, sleepily eating stale bread for breakfast as he awoke earlier with his father to help prepare the dogs. He knows not yet what the purpose was for the early rise. He bolts upright at the sudden sounds of the chaos just outside The Wall. Scared adrenaline fills him. But it only takes a moment before he realizes from where the sounds are coming from. Filled with dreadful realization that the party may have found the little white creature and are at his spot on The Wall. Will flings himself out of the chair and races out of the hutch. Heart pounding madly, and eyes wide. Winston barks once and follows after his master. All of Will's thoughts are narrowed to his spot on The Wall and the beautiful little white creature. 'What have I done?' keeps going around in his head, as imaginings of the little white creature caught, sear into his inner eye.

'What have I done?'

On the opposite side of The Wall, the big black creature, hears the frightened cry of its sibling. Dropping immediately the bloody carcass of the boar it just hunted down. Pure unadulterated rage and fear fill its every essence to the brim. If anything has happened to his little one, there will be much bloodshed and feasting. Moving almost to quick for the human eye, it makes its way towards the painful sound. Each cry pushing it on faster and faster.

Meanwhile, Will has reached The Wall and practically flings himself through, scratching himself on the wood through the gap. It is there that the nightmare images in his head become real, projecting outward until he sees it clear in front of his very eyes. The villagers are using crossbows and spears to attack the little white creature, while the dogs circle around and entrap it. Will's heart feels like it is shattering into pieces from the pure petrified look in the little white creatures eyes. How can they not see that this is just a child like himself? How can they see evil and threat in such beauty? Its body is already marked deep with wounds from both dogs and weapons alike, and it seems to be crying pitifully.

This is Will's fault, he must fix this. Filled with righteous anger, he wretches forward and in a voice that sounds almost every part the man he will become one day, he commands “HEEL!”

The dogs immediately stop. Fully aware of their masters voice.

Mr. Graham looks over in shock at the presence of his son. “What are you doing here boy!? Are you mad?!? Get away!!!” To the dogs, he commands, “ATTACK!”

“NO!” Will screams in anger. The dogs, unsure of what to do, stop their attack on the little white creature in confusion. The rest of the villagers look back and between them in distress. It seemed so deadly clear what to do a moment before. Mr. Crawford grabs a few stunned men and pushes them into movement, shooting a crossbow arrow at the little white creature who has attempted in the confusion to sneak away.

“DON'T LET IT GET AWAY!” Mr. Crawford bellows.

Mr. Graham has walked quick steps over to his son, and grabs him roughly by the arm. “You go back boy!” Mr. Graham growls, shaking Will in emphasis. But Will cannot let this attack continue here, and he attempts to get free.

“No! You can't kill her!”

Suddenly the air around them heaves and everyone goes still. Then a rush of air and a gurgle. One of the villagers is violently spun around by a force unseen, blood spurting from a throat split from ear to ear. He falls down dead and then it appears. Standing in front of the little white creature, tall and deadly, it is the stuff of nightmares. Smooth hairless skin as black as coal with long sharp talons. Its fangs show a double set of sharp teeth on the canines, its body thin where you can see ribs and bone, but still muscular, broad, and clearly strong. On its head, a pair of magnificent black stag horns sit sharp and lethal. It's eyes, a deep red well full of rage filled dark. In silence, it quickly does away with another villager in a spectacular blood spray of torn flesh, before knocking down Mr. Crawford to the ground with a swipe of it talons, wounding the mans entire chest. It glances back at the little white creature who is standing, gripping its hurt torso and whimpering. The creature would see its sibling safe. The villagers try in vain to attack the deadly black creature, but are swatted down like irritable bugs.

Mr. Graham gets over his stunned seizing, again attempting to wrestle Will further back. Will resists and continues to call out, trying to get them to stop attacking. “Stop! Please! You don't understand!” all pointless repeated cries, falling empty on frenzied ears. Mr. Graham gives another call for the dogs to attack.

Soon, the tall black creature starts to have difficulties protecting both itself, and the little white creature from both the dogs and the villagers, who brandish painful torched fire. Everything has turned sharp in sensation, air both thick and thin at the same time, danger taking form to whisper all around them, the shadows made by the moving figures flicker violently from the dark yet rising light of the beginning dawn. In a bid to help, Will finally manages to wrestle himself out of Mr. Grahams grip and whistles loud and clear. The dogs hear immediately, and as exceptionally trained as they are, retreat back to Will. A few limping from wounds inflicted by the tall black creature. Winston has wriggled through the gap in The Wall, and joins his master at his side where he belongs, eyes and body at the ready.

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING BOY!?!?” Mr. Graham bellows, he grabs Will again and savagely back hands the boy to the ground. Will falls, hitting his head on a convenient rock stationed on the dirt below and lies stunned. Moving forward to pick up a fallen spear, Mr. Graham suddenly gives a brutal yell as Winston attacks his other arm, hanging onto it with his bite in defense of his master. Not deterred and in a full berserk, Mr. Graham pulls back before throwing the spear at the tall black creature still attacking the villagers. Unfortunately, Mr. Graham still has Winston on his arm, as well as being still half inebriated, and his aim appalling even on a good day.

The spear misses.

It instead hits a different mark.

Speeding by the tall black creature to decline slightly before...

THUNK.

It spears the little white creature right through the chest.

The little white creature gives a tiny little “Eep.” of surprise before collapsing to the ground in a heap.

Everything stills.

The tall black creature stops, turns, then gives one of the most painful and anguish filled screams in history. Filled with shock, pain, and complete sorrow, it knows it cannot help its sibling anymore.

No life force is sensed.

She is gone.

Taken from him by these wretched human pigs. Giving another roar of rage it batters past the other remaining villagers, straight towards the one that has just taken his world from him.

But we shall backtrack from this devastating moment for a short moment and remember Will, who has just been stunned to the ground.

Winston, who has followed for the first time his master through the gap, let's go of Mr. Graham's arm from biting him in Will's defense, and starts to whine and lick at his fallen masters face.

Will rouses groggily, lifting his head only to see and hear the sickening thunk as the spear connects with the little white creature. The look on its face will haunt Will for the rest of his life. A look filled with surprised shock and pain. Will can only cry out weakly, tears filling his eyes.

“No....”

In that next split few seconds, questions of what if, the regret, the sadness, the shock, and the loss, jumble about his mind. Scenarios where things go differently fill his imagination, and yes, even denial of reality. But before he can dwell too long on it, his whole body is filled with such anger and he only dimly hears the tall black creature roar.

Feeling pure black hate directed at him, Will almost loses consciousnesses at the emotion.

But.

It is not directed at him.

Will raises his eyes to his father just a short distance away, and sees the black creature on a war path to him. Mr. Graham's eyes fill with terror at what is approaching. Winston, sensing overwhelming danger slinks closer to Will's side, trembling from the imposing creature soon upon them.

Mr. Graham is alone.

He knows he cannot possibly fight this creature. He has no weapon, and the other men and Mr. Crawford are still wounded and unable to assist right now. His son lies half stunned behind him, and the dogs are skulking and low to the ground at the approach of a predator clearly more deadly than them.

Mr. Graham is then suddenly overwhelmed by a great burning pain throughout his torso as the black creature reaches him. It has shoved its talons through his chest, relishing the painful cry of the human man pig before him, and lifting him up to his blood red eyes.

Black death fills Mr. Grahams vision, and melancholy enough, his last thoughts are of the beautiful wife he had failed, and his son, who is so much like her in appearance whom he is going to leave behind.

But death waits for no regrets, nor proper closure.

The black creature opens its mouth wide showing sharp fangs and teeth, and rips into the mans throat, swallowing the large chunk of flesh whole and raising its head to scream to the dawning sky.

Mr. Graham gurgles, then dies, slumping limply in the black creatures grasp.

Will's head is filled with static. His hearing a ringing chime of broken bells, and he can only watch as the creature kills his father. He feels detached, yet strangely calm. He can see and feel the beauty of blood spilled, the retribution justified, smell the metallic tang in the air, the red that fills his vision.

Then the stillness of death.

Will feels fear, regret, triumph, and murder.

He promptly hangs his head and vomits onto the ground.

The black creature lets the pathetic dead body drop. It is still in so much sorrow and pain. It feels almost crippled by it. But through its peripheral eye it sees movement and immediately looks.

It sees a small human, a youngling no doubt.

Strange to have a youngling here, they are usually secreted away.

The little youngling is on the ground. The black creature can smell the scent of fear and bile from the puddle under its head, now lifting to meet with the black creatures eyes with its own.

Now, there are moments in time when the world seems to stand still. When there is nothing in the whole universe except the two beings involved. Their first meeting written in the stars. It is not ignorance of the world around them, nor a narrowing of focus really. The black creature does not forget its recent kill, still fresh between its teeth, nor the deep ache of loss from the murder of its beloved gentle sibling. Will does not forget the stale note of his father, Mr. Graham's death in the air, nor the feeling of harsh hard dirt and dry grass underneath him and the sour smell of his vomit as he lies there. Nor can he feel nothing but fear in his own upcoming and assuming death at being the focus of this creature, who has always killed his kind. No, this is not a ignoring of reality. But it is a connection. A sudden realization of each other. This is this being, and that is that being, and you share the same air and time as each other. Different, but the same. They both breath calm, and deep of each other.

For the first time in his life, Will sees more than his provincial life in the village, he sees a dark world he has hidden deep inside himself come to the fore.

For the first time since his existence, the black creature sees hope for understanding from another creature not itself, a shared darkness.

Then the black creature screams in flooded pain and awareness as it's body seizes. A crossbow bolt has sunken deep into its flesh from the back.

Will gasps and he looks towards the direction of where the bolt might have come from.

The villagers, those not dead, have scrambled up from the ground in a strengthening show of fortitude and survival. Mr. Crawford holds a torch in one hand, and his opposite arm over his torso to help stem the flow of blood from his wounded chest. It was Mr. Cordell who has shot the bolt, and is even now placing another in ready. His face drenched in blood, smile manic. The black creature spins but in his suddenly pain filled state, cannot move in time to stop or dodge another bolt from Mr. Cordell which now lodges itself in its chest. Another two bolts from the other villagers crossbows appear deep in the creatures arm and leg. The black creatures painful moans fill the air as it is driven to its hands and knees. Other villagers surge forward in sudden hopeful survival and sense of winning, brandishing fiery torches at the creature, who tries to shed away. Will can only look on in horror and wide eyes as the creature, overcome by loss, the fight, and the whole circumstance, is for the first time, defeated. Collapsing to the ground, breathing heavily and thinly, straining for life.

The villagers yell in triumph. Only Mr. Crawford keeps his head. Moving to the creature he notices its breathing.

“It is still alive.” He says.

“Kill it!” Screams one villager.

Mr. Cordell goes to stand above it, and shoot it in the head.

“No!”

A small cry, weak but strong, is heard coming from the ground. Will has his head raised, blood trailing down his neck. His eyes are so sorrowful that all the adults give pause. Mr.

Crawford looks down at Will, looking so young and fragile as a piece of thin glass.

“Will...this creature....”

“Do not kill it!” A shrieking male voice yells from further down The Wall. Mr. Mason huffs towards them, his 'holy robes' waving behind him, his eyes gleaming with chance and greed. He is waving his hands imperiously. Mr. Crawford looks like he is about to hemorrhage.

“What do you mean DO NOT KILL IT?! ARE YOU MAD!!?” Mr. Crawford bellows.

Mr. Mason does not reply. A small group of villagers follow behind him. They obviously are the back up. Or the clean up. They go to the wounded and the dead, and assist where they can. A small group with torches surround the incapacitated black creature, their eyes wide with shock, fright, and awe at the thing before them. The tall black creature is panting, and cannot even lift its head. Skewered by cross bow bolts and still trying to shed away from the fire. Mr. Mason approaches it on the ground, coming right up to it. In his face there is no fear, just greed. Not heeding the warning tones of Mr. Crawford and a few others, he almost reaches out to touch its black heaving skin before pulling back at the last moment and releasing an excited manic giggle.

“What a creature!” Mr. Mason exclaims. “It is as if the very devil has taken form of the night.”

“I find your enthusiasm unsettling holy man.” Mr. Crawford grumbles. “Now would you care to explain to us why on all that is good in this world...why we should not finally strike this creature down where it is on natures earth? End all our suffering and torment, and avenge those of our kind it has killed!?” Mr. Crawford's voice is soft but booming, and holds all the power of his standing. Even Mr. Mason draws back for a moment. But he is undeterred, his eyes and voice sly.

“We have tried so long to kill this creature, what has brought it down now? Why did it appear so close to The Wall here?”

For a moment Mr. Crawford can't stop himself from glancing down at little Will Graham still lying in the dirt, still seemingly in shock, and is at the moment staring off into Wolf Trap Wood with unseeing eyes. Mr. Mason is about to track Mr. Crawford's glance when, unable to stop himself from taking the credit and spotlight in the eyes of his mentor and role model. Mr. Cordell, steps forward with a wide proud grin.

“It was I. I made the telling blow.”

Mr. Mason looks at his faithful follower with another delightful, but to be honest, downright creepy giggle. “You? Oh, well done Mr. Cordell! Well done!” Mr. Mason claps his hands together softly in joy. “But how?”

Mr. Cordell lifts up his crossbow, now empty of bolts and beams. “It was the cross bow and the special bolts you gave me Mr. Mason. You were right!”

Mr. Mason claps again in glee. “Oh what good holy times! Praise be!”

Mr. Crawford is looking ill and fit to burst, following the sickening exchange between Mr. Mason and Mr. Cordell. “And WHAT pray tell is special about these bolts?”

Mr. Mason turns a sneaky superior look to Mr. Crawford, which makes the bigger man bristle. “The bolts are made of the finest pure silver, and holy blessed wood.”

Mr. Crawford, despite his wound clearly paining him, seems to blow up in anger. “AND WHY DID YOU NOT SAY SOMETHING BEFORE NOW! THAT WAY WE COULD HAVE SAVED THE LIVES OF OUR FRIENDS?!?”

Mr. Mason turns petulant. “Silver is hard to come by. I had to get it sent to us from a town far away, from our most holy man. There was also no guarantee that it would work as I have personally never seen this creature before, and could not assume what type of hell beast it is.” Mr. Mason looks back down at the creature, still trying to get up and move. But it cannot, it's supernatural strength finally at its limit. “Now looking at it,” Mr. Mason continues. “It has clearly been sent from the darkest depths. There are rumors that such creatures can be reborn from its end, and come back stronger. I don't know about YOU Mr. Crawford, but I would like to avoid that outcome.”

Mr. Crawford, feels drained. He can't argue with Mr. Mason's point. He clutches his wounded chest tight and draws a shaking hand over his face. “Then what do you think about that?” he asks, pointing to the dead little white creature. The spear thrown by Mr. Graham still in its chest. Even in death it is still beautiful and innocent looking, like a fae creature from stories. Mr. Mason's eyes go wide upon looking at the little white creature.

“WHAT do we have here?!”

Mr. Cordell, walks over to the little white creature and kicks it hard in the side with a wet thud, sound reminiscent of its death blow. “Dead.”

Mr. Mason seems to deflate a little upon this fact, but goes up to it nonetheless, picking up a stick and poking at it, lifting its arm up and allowing it to fall back to the earth limply. “It certainly is a creature of the same, such a small little piggy though.”

At the noise of Mr. Cordell's kick. Will raises his head, eyes stark and on the little white creature he has in his guilt ridden mind, indirectly sentenced to death. At the motions of Mr. Mason poking it. Will lets out an involuntary whimper of distress. Heard by Mr. Crawford who looks down at the boy sharply, half relieved to hear him aware, half alarmed by his reaction. Looking back to Mr. Mason. “Are we safe from it? Do you think it will be reborn like this other one might?”

Mr. Mason looks thoughtful. “Perhaps not. This does seem to be a child version of this other creature, perhaps its byproduct, or one of its litter. Who knows? It seems to have died easily enough.” Mr. Mason makes a thoughtful hum noise “I will have to take it back also, and runs tests on how to best purify it, so that I can maybe use the same methods on the other one, and dull its power.” Mr. Mason turns an all too pleased smile upon Mr. Crawford. “You see? I AM helping protect this village best as I can. The most holy man did say you must be very very careful and choose your actions wisely in all things.”

Mr. Crawford growls softly in irritation. “Very well then, as you seem to hold the answers to everything, explain to me how we are going to get this...thing... safely into the village and contained. Do you perhaps have more of this precious silver to use that you could not previously grace us with?”

Mr. Mason gives another gleeful grin. “Indeed I do Mr. Crawford! Indeed I do! The most holy man was very very generous with me, as I am one of his best and proud followers of the all word! I have silver chains that should contain it good and well for now. I will also send word straight away to gain help in building a suitable cage for such a thing as this creature.”

“FINE.” Mr. Crawford abruptly agrees. His patience and strength finally waning to a thin string. “But as soon as this thing is secure and guard duty at all hours arranged, I want a gathering of the people. I WILL NOT have their worst fear and torment suddenly be living among us without them knowing, and ALL in agreement!”

Mr. Mason waves a hand in a placating gesture. “Of course, of course, we shall have a gathering. We are not barbarians, I would do nothing to further cause risk to those of our precious village. OH! We MUST get the book and record keepers, the Madchens, to document this great time in history!”

Mr. Crawford gives a big heaving sigh. He is not a man to dwell too long in argument, he has a job to do, no matter how unsettling. He begins bellowing orders. “You there! Get the wounded back to the village and to Mrs. Crawford and Dr. Sutcliffe to see to. You three! Keep your eyes at all times on this creature. It seems deterred by fire. Make sure it knows the burn of the flame! You! Younger lad! You can go back to the village with Mr. Mason and get those special chains to wrap it up like a bug in a spider web. I want this thing contained good and tight, and arrangements made to keep it contained AT ALL TIMES!!!!. ARE WE ALL CLEAR?” Various nods and murmurs of acknowledgement and understanding are sounded, but no one moves. “NOW!!!!” Mr. Crawford has to bellow before everyone scurries off quickly. He looks back to the ground. There, near his feet Mr. Graham lies in his final end, throat and chest, torn and bloody. Such a sickening end. Mr. Crawford has known Mr. Graham for years, and although he holds no affection for the man, especially in regards to the treatment of his once wife and his young son, he has never wanted it to end this way. Especially right in front of the eyes of said son. Mr. Crawford turns to the young child, already so unusual, and no doubt traumatized by what he has just seen.

“Will?”

But Will is not there.

Looking around frantically, afraid the boy has run off in pain. He spots him in the most unlikely of ways. It seems Will has dragged his body across the dirt while Mr. Crawford and Mr. Mason has been conversing, and has situated himself next to the little white creature. Unseen by those around him.

“Will?” Mr. Crawford moves towards the poor boy hesitantly, grimacing in pain.

Will stares down at the little white creature. In his heart he knows it is his fault. He should not have left gifts for it. Should not have enticed it to come to his spot he knew would not

stay hidden for long. Winston has come by to sit near his master, face just as sad. It does not seemed bothered by the creature. Will reaches out with shaking fingers and for the first time, gently caresses his hand down the little white creatures face. Gentle as a butterfly's touch, with eyes pouring tears, and breath that sobs. Its skin feels like smooth glass, cool, and with a faint sheen of gold among the blood. The spear wound is patently obvious, man made, and stark against the natural beauty of the little white creature.

“I am so sorry. So sorry.” Will whispers.

“Will!?” Mr. Crawford's voice is louder with slight shock in watching the boys behavior. He looks as if he has just lost a dear friend. Did Will know of this creature beforehand? Is that why the creature was here when it has not been seen before? Was Will in relation with the creatures? Mr. Crawford feels deeply unsettled. Though he does not expect Will to show too much grief at his fathers death, considering their relationship, he does not expect to see Will so stoutly mourning a creature, even one that looks as pretty as this. Something is not adding up, and although he does not want to push Will at this dreadful time, Will will have to answer some questions as soon as possible. Walking up to the lad, Will looks up at him. His eyes are glazed over with so much pain and emotion, they seem almost manic.

“What have you done?” Will's voice is a trembling childish whisper, “What did you do to her?.....” his head feels like it is about to explode. Over and over again the sight of the little white creature both alive and dead, overlaps in his imagination. Over and over again, he sees a little white hand grab his gift, then chirp with its head cocked, then the pain as the spear strikes it, then its trembling cries as the dogs attacked it, then its fear but relief as the tall black creature stands before it.....over and over the images and feelings swarm through Will, as if he can feel and see everything that has just happened through the body of the now dead little white creature. It is too much, Will can't breath. Mr. Crawford watches in horror as Will seems to seize, eye whites showing clear. Will's head gives an almighty screech of pain, like lightening, before he finally collapses back to the ground in a faint.

“Will!” Mr. Crawford cries in alarm, attempting to reach down and grab the boy, but his body has finally given up, and his wound is fierce. He collapses to his knees beside the now prone Will, gasping in pain. Villagers surround them attempting with grasping hands to help. Mr. Crawford lets two men hoist him up again.

“Someone grab Will and take him straight to Mrs. Crawford, NO ONE ELSE! Are we clear?!” Mr. Budge moves forward. Miraculously, the woodworker has remained mostly unharmed during the attack. Having known he is no fighter, he has been hiding close to The Wall with Mrs. Budge. He picks Will up gently but professionally, and walks towards the closest gate inside. Mrs. Budge, checking Will's forehead and face as they go. Satisfied, Mr. Crawford looks back down at the little white creature. Mr. Cordell, has not moved from its side and is now looking down at it, as if assessing to see whether it can be chopped up.

Sickening.

“Mr. Cordell!” Mr. Crawford barks. Mr. Cordell looks up with a wide grin.

“Since you seem so capable, why don't you take that creature to Mr. Mason? Directly.”

Mr. Cordell's grin remains wide. “Of course, it would be my great pleasure.” With smooth movement he swings his crossbow over his shoulders, and picks up the little white creature, who looks all the more tiny now in the bigger mans arms. Unsettled even more by the whole thing, Mr. Crawford watches the man carry the thing along The Wall. Shrugging off with pain the reaching hands of another villager attempting to help. Mr. Crawford surveys the scene before him. Dead bodies still on the ground, blood pooling and splattered everywhere. The very air still smells like death, and feels like it too, silent and disturbing, despite the sun now rising up just over the treeline, shining bright onto the world. The dogs are now cringing near Mr. Grahams dead body, whining, Will's dog having followed Mr. Budge with Will back inside. Of the others, some are heavily injured and will probably not survive. Mr. Crawford turns to the hovering villager “Go fetch Mr. Hobbs. He is the most familiar with the dogs, and can take care of them in Mr. Graham's stead.” Originally there would have been no problem with Will officially inheriting them, as they clearly follow his orders more. But Will is in no frame of mind to see to them right now. The villager rushes off, only once making a checking backwards glance. Mr. Crawford surveys the scene once more, then with a heavy sigh at what has just occurred, slowly make his way back inside the village, shuffling in pain. He notes with strange dark humor that the gap in The Wall is still gaping, having been left still unfixed. It's presence raw and uncomfortably open, like the world seems to be right now.

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Now, imagine that nothing good will come out of allowing the creature, not of myth now, but of solid black fleshy reality, inside the heart of Maryland village. Indeed, in the end, no one gains a happy result from the time of the creatures incarceration here. Least of all little Will Graham.

As the villagers move the creature inside, equal chaos and questions by the whole waking and gathering village ensue. Strange, since it is usually the world outside The Wall where things occur, that is chaotic. Now it is silent, empty of the powerful creature that gave the wood its dark breath. Mayor Purnell is standing at the forefront of the grouped villagers. He watches with complete speechlessness as the black creature, now wrapped in shiny silver chains, is dragged forward. It lifts its head once stopped, to glare balefully around at the wretched pigs gawking at it, but it cannot persevere, and lets its head fall back heavily to the ground, letting out a painful long moan. At the sound, every villager jumps exclaiming loudly. Mayor Purnell, turns white around the edges of his eyes and mouth, and looks seriously towards Mr. Crawford, who now shuffles towards him.

“What is this?” Mayor Purnell hisses lip curling.

Mr. Crawford, doesn't see any reason to not tell the blank and ugly truth.

“We found another creature at the treeline...”

“WHAT!?”

As if on cue, Mr. Cordell walks towards them with the little white creature in his arms. Smiling widely, he drops his burden right at the feet of Mayor Purnell. Unfortunately, this also places it right beside the black creature, who finds enough strength to look to the side at his poor dead beloved sibling, and let out a roar of anger. Those holding the black creature's chains, tighten them. The whole village jumps again and starts to panic. Women clutch at their chests in distress, men rumble angrily and ready themselves to defend. Mayor Purnell steps back in fright.

“What?....Why?...”

By this time, Mr. Crawford has had enough of this day. He wants nothing more than to go and be seen to by his soothing wife, to check on little Will, and to kill the black creature so it can never kill again.

Not necessarily in that order.

“Ask Mr. Mason. We had the creature surrounded, it has killed many. Mr. Mason stopped us from ending its life.” Crawford says.

“WHAT?!” Mayor Purnell looks completely overcome. “Why to all of the heavens? And what does it have to do with this other....thing?!”

“We believe it's in relation to the black creature. When we attacked it, the other arrived.” Mr. Crawford explains.

“So there were two...of course.” Mayor Purnell looks thoughtful, pondering. “If there are two it stands to reason that there might be more.”

“So it may seem. Mr. Mason for some unholy reason, thinks it may birth itself again if we kill it.” Mr. Crawford snorts. “He wants to keep it captured to test. The little one too. But we MUST kill it! Now! Before something happens. While we have our chance!”

Mayor Purnell considers his long time friend and right hand man. He too thinks the black creature, that which has been tormenting them for years should be killed immediately. But never has he made any decision lightly and without discussion, and although he is not completely taken in by Mr. Mason's 'holy followings', he is mayor, and rules and guidelines must be adhered to. He looks around at the villagers, whom a bit braver, all slide forwards to see the black creature more clearly. Little children now sneaking out of the house, curious about the commotion. Shivering from the cold, he says “I assume Mr. Mason has an answer on where to keep this...thing?”

Mr. Crawford, lets out a sigh of pain. He should have known that it would not be so easy in convincing all to simply kill the creature. “Yes. He mentioned something....”

“Then get both…. things there immediately. It is causing too much chaos here. I want a meeting of the leaders at my house as soon as it is sorted.” Mayor Purnell then softens his look as he finally sees the blooded state his friend is in. “Tend to yourself. You have done well. Whether alive or captured this creature can torment this village no longer. How big are

our losses?" Because there is no thinking otherwise, that this incident went by with no casualties.

Mr. Crawford rattles off the names of the men he saw clearly to have passed on from this world. He mentions Mr. Graham's name last. It is met with a mix of pity and grim acceptance. Mr. Graham is not a well liked man, but no one likes to disrespect the dead. "We shall have to speak to young Will then, before words travels to him from others, though that may already be the case." Mayor Purnell formally comments with a frown.

Mr. Crawford hesitates. "Young Will was with us when this occurred Mayor Purnell."

A sharp and alarming look follows this tiny bit of information. "Why was Will there? Did his father bring him?"

"No." Mr. Crawford recalls, remembering spotting Will confronting his father, then the strange and disturbing reaction Will shows by the body of the white creature "I believe he knows the white creature."

Mayor Purnell's eyes widen. "Knows?" he asks softly. Mr. Crawford nods reluctantly, wanting to protect young Will from further trauma this day, but knowing there are some questions to be asked of him. Mayor Purnell makes a deep humming sound of discontent. "Bring young Will to the meeting then. We will sort this out and Maryland village will prevail once more. Now free of this danger." Mayor Purnell's lip curls as he looks back down at the heavily panting creature, now somehow more human like in the rising morning sun, but no less dangerous.

The creature ends up thoroughly chained in a steel cage, with angelic runes and symbols engraved in silver around it and on the bars. It slumps there, not moving but for its milky white eyes, devoid now of any red, which watches their every move. The cage is situated inside a large empty cabin on Mr. Mason's property. Mrs. Mason is not present anywhere, that anyone can see. Mr. Crawford narrows his eyes to the cabin, not believing for one second the 'in case of guests' excuse Mr. Mason gives for his reason of having an empty cabin far from his main house, nor one that contains an already made cage. But no one questions Mr. Mason, no reason why not, just blind acceptance, as is the case of most villages back then. If you are authoritative enough, people don't ask. Guards are arranged, for morning and night watch. Mr. Mason seems a little put off at this constant surveillance in his property, a peek of disgruntlement showing through his disgustingly smug pride at having the creature in his grubby paws. But he backs down under Mr. Crawford's glare. Mr. Crawford doesn't want to take any chances. Once all is settled, Mr. Crawford walks straight for Mrs. Crawford, where he finally receives the care and soothing he deserves. Having already received young Will from Mr. Budge, Mrs. Crawford is right beside herself with worry.

Soon enough though, the leaders gather together in Mr. Purnell's home, and big bricked structure. Neat and very clean with not much adornment, inside holds a massive solid wooden table and velvet chairs. Usually only used for talks and discussions such as this, or for the big Winterfest banquets Mrs. Purnell hosts each year. 'Leaders' is also using a very loose term to describe the gathering. It consists of a group of adults that Mayor Purnell has chosen to listen to about such things around the village. Mrs. Purnell is sitting in as she always does. Mr. Mason is here, as is Mr. Cordell. Mrs. Mason sits silently next to her

husband. She looks no less beautiful, but very wane as per usual. Her red head down to her clutched hands on her legs, all submissive wife behavior. Miss Alana is here, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Budge, as they are capable witnesses of the creature's capture. A few other close friends of Mayor Purnell are present, as are Mr. and Mrs. Madchen, as official record keepers of the village. Mr. Hobbs, stands lurking by the doorway as is his fashion. Mr. Crawford is of course present, as is Mrs. Crawford, sitting in place of Dr Sutcliffe who is still at the moment, tending to the wounded. Mrs. Crawford has insisted on attending anyway, on the basis of young Will, who looks so small and helpless, sitting in his chair among them with a blanket over his slim shoulders. Mrs. Crawford sits close, clearly in protective mode, but Will does not notice. He stares blankly at the table before him, face expressionless.

Once a cohesive and chronological explanation of the events of Wolf Trap Wood, The Wall, and the black creature are hashed out, the real debate begins in all its argumentative glory.

“Why do we not kill it!?” a man by the name of Boyle, calls out in superior fear. Mr. Crawford cannot argue in the sentiment itself. Every part of the man wants to go down to Mr. Mason's cabin, and strangle the thing with its silver chains, before burning it alive. His sense of diplomacy the only thing keeping him in his chair. That and his still wounded chest.

Mr. Mason gives a airy sigh of exasperation and tuts at Boyle. “Don't you know that if you kill a creature such as this, then it will only come back stronger?” Mr. Mason ruffles with his robes and gives a soft laugh. “You speak of things you do not understand. This creature is from the darkest depths. It will take one of superior skill in the light to properly vanquish it.”

“And YOU of course, have that skill Mr. Mason?” Miss Alana asks dryly.

Mr. Mason gives her a smug smile. “Indeed I do Miss. Alana. The village can feel safe once more knowing that I have it all in hand.”

“And in a cage...” Miss. Alana adds under breath. Mr. Mason gives a huff and pretends to not hear her. He turns to Mayor Purnell who is actively listening to the voices all round. “It will be best that I deal with this threat. I can learn a lot from my testing...”

“Torture.” Mr. Crawford interjects.

Mr. Mason gives a giggle and gleam, “Need I remind you Mr. Crawford, that THAT CREATURE has killed many of us over the years. Innocents. Surely, you are not adverse to my using just as drastic and harsh methods to ensure our safety? And the proper riddance of such creatures?”

“Creatures?” Mayor Purnell speaks for the first time since hearing about the event by The Wall. “You think there may be more than the two alone?”

“It would certainly explain the appearance of the smaller white creature.” Mr. Mason reasons. “Though from first glance it seems male in gender, it is only in part. It has no...ummm...full male appendage. There is no definite way to explain how the creatures may birth their young. We will have to assume there are others. It would also explain how it has bested us in attacks, it may not be quick so much as there are many.”

“Or it could simply be that much of a predator.” Mr. Crawford interjects angrily. “You were not there when it first attacked. It was fast, it was dangerous, and it was very on point!”

“I conquer with Mr. Crawford.” Mr. Budge adds in his soft voice.

Mr. Mason turns a slimy placating look to Mr. Crawford, his tone pitying. “Of course, though you were injured and fell, and this creature is beyond mere human understanding.” Mr. Mason holds his hands palms upwards in helplessness, and nods to Mr. Budge. “I am not saying that you are lying in all the holy light's understanding. I am merely saying that we should not dismiss the idea. Papa always told me to be prepared is to be plentiful in the end.”

Mayor Purnell watches the discussion back and forth. Holding up a hand to silence further argument, he turns to Miss Alana and the Madchens. “Is there any truth to all this speculation? What do we know?” The Madchens hesitate. Mrs. Georgia Madchen speaks “We know nothing in the old records. Only what we have seen and heard from those left alive. We know it kills, we know it hunts, we know it lives in Wolf Trap Wood. All accounts of its inhuman look and strength and size can be spoken for, clear as we may view it now.”

Mrs. Purnell curls her lip in disgust. “ Abomination,” she hisses. “I agree with Mr. Mason. We must deal severely with this creature.” Mr. Mason gives a clap of joy at this. Mayor Purnell simply turns to Miss. Alana. “Is there any truth to what Mr. Mason claims? What have your books told you?”

Miss. Alana too, hesitates in her reply. “I have not yet been able to research much in this short time. What I can tell you, is only what I have read about in a very old writing of folklore.” Miss. Alana gives a helpless shrug, but Mayor Purnell leans forward in his chair, his eyes like an eagles. “Please Miss. Alana, tell us what you know so that we may come to a proper decision.”

“From what I found, and from what I saw, the creature is called a Wendigo...”

Mr. Crawford spies something at the corner of his eye and is startled to see that upon Miss. Alana's words, young Will has finally risen his head and sits with rapt attention, focusing on Miss. Alana. It unsettles Mr. Crawford a bit.

“A creature of the dark and the cold.” Miss. Alana continues, “It explains why the village has been so cold lately, even though it is at the start of the blooming and summertime. It is said to be a monstrous creature of strength and speed, and yes.... it is said to be unhurt by normal weaponry, and told to be able to reincarnate.” Miss. Alana adds the last part reluctantly, not happy to be confirming any truth out of Mr. Mason words. The latter, whom hears her last confirmation with an even higher air of righteous preening, earning an eye roll from Miss. Alana.

“Is there anything else you can tell us?” Mr. Crawford asks. Anything that might justify in his argument that the creature be destroyed immediately.

Miss. Alana turns to the gruff man with a small but sad smile. “Only that it...well....” Miss. Alana dies off in speech.

“What else Miss. Alana?” Mayor Purnell encourages.

“Well...” Miss Alana speaks slowly and nervously. “Only that it is an abomination, not born, but made from man... a man... who has cursed himself by eating the flesh of his own kind.”

Shocked gasps and murmurs of disturbance echo around the table. Mayor Purnell sits back with a frown, Mrs. Purnell turns green with a hand to her mouth.

“SUCH AN ABOMINATION SHOULD BE DESTROYED IMMEDIATELY!” Mr. Crawford yells, slamming his fist onto the table for emphasis. He attempts to stand only to be reminded painfully of his wound, and sits back down with a groan. Mrs. Crawford puts a soothing hand on his arm.

“Nonsense! If it was once a man, then there is every possibility that he can be cured by the holy light!” Mr. Mason says. His face full of manic religious faith. Mr. Crawford snorts with all derision, only outdone by Miss. Alana's disgusted face.

“Not everything can be cured by your so called holy light!” Mr. Crawford states starkly.

“You DARE spout blasphemies against the holy light and its teachings?!” Mr. Mason whispers livid.

“If it saves lives and the village, then YES!!!!” Mr. Crawford challenges.

Mr. Mason opens his mouth to make his rebuttal.

“ENOUGH!” Mayor Purnell shouts. He gives a big sigh and thinks in contemplation.

The room is filled with quiet.

“The creature has not been caught since it first made its presence known to us. The only reason now that I can infer, is due to the white creature being found by us. But we have never seen the white creature until today. Why?” Mayor Purnell turns to Mr. Crawford and includes the small hunched figure of Will in his sight. “Is there something you should tell us Mr. Crawford?” Everyone turns in their stares and attention to Mr. Crawford and Will. Will sinks deeper into his blanket and chair, not liking the sudden focused attention of the whole room on him at all. Mr. Crawford looks down at the boy and gives a hard sigh. “Will....why were you there today? Did you follow your father?” Mr. Crawford asks the boy with the softest tone he can muster.

Will is again staring blankly at the table before him. Mrs. Crawford reaches out and settles the blanket better on his slim shoulders.

“Will?” Mr. Crawford presses again. Will looks up in a quick glance then shakes his head, looking back down. At Mayor Purnell's impatient sound, Mr. Crawford moves off his chair to squat in front of Will with a pained noise. Mrs. Crawford reaches out instinctively to her husband, the movement making Will look up and meet him in the eye. Will's eyes are filled with pained sadness and scared uncertainty.

“Will, I saw you with the white creature.” Will's eyes widen at that, and confirms to Mr. Crawford that Will knows about the white creature more than he first thought. “We have to know the truth Will. Tell us the truth. Have you seen the white and black creatures before?”. Will nods, hesitating, his words when spoken are halting.

“I never spoke to the white creature, and I haven't ever played with her or anything.”

“Her?” Mr. Mason interrupts, earning a sharp look from Mr. Crawford.

Will nods. “Her.”

“How do you know it is a her?” Mason asks greedily.

“I just know.” Will replies in a soft voice.

“Did you make the hole in The Wall?” Mr Budge asks suddenly.

Will looks up startled. “Yes.... I mean... I found it, made it bigger later so I could....” Will winces at the stern disapproving look that comes upon Mr. Budges face. The table is surrounded by angry murmurs, aware now that they have always been at risk from a hole in The Wall. Mr. Mason opens his mouth again, but is silenced this time by a look off Mayor Purnell. The mayor is not completely unsympathetic to the young boys state right now, but he has a village to protect, and he needs answers. “Start at the beginning Will.” Mayor Purnell instructs, leveling a sharp look around the table that promises harm should anyone interrupt the boy again.

Will takes a stuttering breath, then speaks in a small voice devoid of emotion. “I found that a plank was loose on The Wall when I was walking around it one day. I stole.....well I stole some tools to get through the metal wiring. I like Wolf Trap Wood. I like going there with the dogs and Mr. Hobbs and Abigail. I go there and sit just outside The Wall at night sometimes, when...when my fath....” Will stutters to a stop and trails to silence, his eyes widening as the memory of Mr. Grahams demise floats across his vision. Sharp black talons and teeth ripping into what was his fathers body, but is now just meaty flesh. Will can still smell and almost taste the metallic blood once more. The whole room shifts uncomfortably. They have always known of Mr. Graham's temper and behavior towards his boy. But like most villages, what goes on behind closed doors is often ignored and unspoken for.

“That is very dangerous, sitting outside The Wall Will,” Alana softy comments, giving the boy a gentle look. “You can get hurt, not just by the creature, but by other predators.”

“I'm not afraid of the wood.” Will exclaims stubbornly. “The woods never hurt me, and I feel...well I feel peaceful like there.”

“You cannot blame the child for what is in his blood.” Mr. Hobbs interjects strongly. “There are some who are at one with nature. I have seen it myself when I have brought the children out.”

“We are not arguing young Will's foolish acts in going beyond The Wall right now. Though the act does in itself have consequences, no doubt placing the whole village in danger. It is

not main issue that should be addressed right now. Will has, in my opinion, learnt from that mistake whether it be in his nature to have done so or not." Mayor Purnell speaks with authority. He again turns to Will, and makes it very clear, exactly, what he wants to know about. "Tell us about the creatures Will."

"It was on one of the nights. I saw the white creature. She just stood there. Looking at me." Will gives a small smile. "She was so pretty, and didn't seem to mean me no harm." Will's voice turns a little bit louder and more anxious. "But she ran away when I approached." Will fiddles with the edges of the blanket as he continues. "She didn't come back. But then I spoke to Mrs. Crawford, and she told me that girls like flowers and such." Will looks up at Mrs. Crawford, who gives the boy a small strained smile, remembering the frowning little child as he pouted on what to do with the upset Molly. "So I gathered some, flowers that is, and left it by The Wall. The next night they were gone."

"Did you leave more gifts?" Mr. Crawford asks. Will nods "I left flowers, some toffee, small toys. I always knew she got them. But whenever I tried to spot her again she would leave them a while. So I stopped looking, and just left them there. I still sat by The Wall, and stayed, but I never tried to see her. Only once I saw her by accident, taking the gift I had left."

"It sounds as if you were courting the thing." Mr. Mason says snidely.

"No!" Will responds indignant. "I just.....she seemed to like them." Will trails off again.

"Did you ever see the black creature Will?" Mayor Purnell asks.

Will shakes his head. "No. He never turned up. Sometimes though, I would feel something watching me. Some...dark thing...not her, but something else. But it was never more than that. Even when I started to bring the gifts to the treeline. I suppose it knew I never meant no harm." Will forgets to mention that first time he heard it bellow. They already know that it has a relationship with the little white creature. No need to the fire.

"It could also be that Will is a child in it's eyes, and not worth the threat." Mr. Hobbs interludes again. "Most predators will not attack children, not unless the child itself has attacked it or one of its own young. The black creature for all of its killing has not harmed our children, nor the dogs if it can help it. We have already discerned that it is an intelligent creature, plus it seems to have a child of its own. Children are precious golden gifts bestowed to us, to any creature"

" You think that is why it left young Will alone, despite his ventures outside The Wall?" Mayor Purnell asks. Mr. Hobbs nods once in agreement.

"You are all blind to it's dark nature, poor little lambs." Mr. Mason comments with all the condescension he can muster.

"You have another opinion Mr. Mason?" Mayor Purnell turns with guarded eyes to the holy man.

"Why yes," Mr. Mason smiles sickeningly sweet. "It is a creature of the dark, and evil to its core. No doubt the white creature is simply a pretty little lure to trap such weak minds as

some people here, who may think otherwise of my explanation, and of course our precious children such as young Will here." Mr. Mason gestures a light hands towards Will, who does not feel precious at the gesture, but rather superfluous. Mr. Mason continues.

"The creature has no sense on who it should attack, it merely lures you in. This is the result! The boy starts to give gifts to the things! It is a tribute and form of worship! A false one and wrongly done. The boy clearly has been coerced and has turned to the evil side. He should be dealt with."

"What are you saying Mr. Mason?!" Miss. Alana cries out.

"I am saying, that Will has undoubtedly turned to the creatures side against us. Mr. Cordell has told me troubling news about the event just past. That Will cried out for the creatures to not be hurt, calling off the dogs, and even getting his mutt to attempt to stop Mr. Grahams efforts to kill the black creature, ultimately helping the creature, and aiding in its killing of Mr. Graham. His OWN FATHER." Mr. Mason sits back with a pleased smile.

Shock and alarm fill the villagers. Mrs. Crawford grasps Will by the shoulders as if in an attempt to shield Will from such stark truths. Miss. Alana gasps with hands to her mouth and eyes wide, as if she cannot believe Mr. Mason has just stated such in front of the clearly traumatized boy. Mr. Crawford narrows deadly enraged eyes and hisses "Mason....."

Will is rattled to completion at Mr. Mason words. Mainly because he knows them to be true. In that moment, he had valued the creatures lives before his own father. He can't even comprehend just what kind of child that makes him. Even more right now, because he still can't muster regret over his actions. Indeed, he feels guilty at the fact that he does not feel guilty about his fathers demise. He is sad, when all is said and done Mr. Graham is....was, his father. But Will knows he would do the same thing again given the chance, and that thought leaves a tasteless ash feeling in his mouth, and a sick churning pit in his tummy.

Around the room murmurs grow in sound while Mr. Mason looks upon it all with satisfaction. Mayor Purnell calls for quiet but Mr. Mason is not done.

"For his actions the boy needs to be taken into care."

"Explain Mr. Mason." Mayor Purnell commands, startled despite himself.

"I will take him into my custody, and bring him directly to the Great City, to face the justice of the holy council." Mr. Mason happily states, as if he has no problem whatsoever demanding punishment on an innocent a child.

However, immediate refusals and disagreements come from Mr and Mrs. Crawford, and Miss Alana.

"You said so yourself Mr. Mason, that the creatures are devilish and can take advantage of the little minds of our children. If that is the case then I see no reason why poor innocent Will should be punished. In my reading, it is said that the Wendigo can trick others by voices and mimicry. It is truly a devastating creature whom we now have captured, so it can cause no more harm, neither can it trick young Will anymore. Or can you NOT do as you say, and

keep the creature in check and protect our village and ALL who live in it?" Miss. Alana gives a challenging look to Mr. Mason, who suddenly appears as if he has just swallowed a sour plum. Not at all used to being challenged. Miss. Alana continues with her head high, looking around, and including in her tirade all grouped at the table. "As for Will's actions surrounding his trips outside The Wall. It is clearly the natural behavior of a growing boy rebelling a little, going to places he should not. As Mr. Hobbs has said, Will is fond of Wolf Trap Wood, and it would make sense that he should choose to go there. His actions towards the white creature, are clearly nothing more than an innocent child's attempt at friendship, despite differing appearances, and his pure thoughts should be commended, not punished. Look at him! Will is clearly beside himself by all this. He has just lost his father, despite what everyone here may think of the man, in a most painful and shocking way right before his eyes. He should be given every form of nurturing and support possible by those around him, so he can move on and grow from this tragic event."

Miss. Alana's words are met with strong nods of agreement and sad sympathetic looks thrown at Will, who simply retreats further into himself, tugging the blanket around his shoulders. Mayor Purnell assesses the two individuals.

Miss. Alana, who's eyes spit fire at Mr. Mason, who is in turn sneering at the woman.

"In this case, I will side with Miss. Alana. This creature is clearly something almost beyond us, and I WILL NOT be so petty or stupid as to put blame on a child. It is more our fault for not checking The Wall better, and not protecting our children from the creatures influence. In a way, it is also a good thing, for had not Will brought the creatures to us, we would not have had the opportunity to kill one previously unknown to us, and finally capture the other. We will keep it alive for now, and I will allow Mr. Mason to do what he wills with it, so we can learn how to best protect ourselves should there be a chance there is more in Wolf Trap Wood. BUT there will be guards at all times. Armed with crossbows and those special silver bolts. I will not take any chance."

There is no argument to this decision. Mr. Mason looks positively in rapture that he can keep the creature in his care. If not for the past killings of his fellow villagers, Mr. Crawford almost feels sorry for the thing.

"And what is to be done about Will now Mayor Purnell? He has no other kin." Mrs. Crawford asks.

"I can still take him to town." Mr. Mason almost crows. "The holy council has a wonderful orphanage for lost young boys such as Will." Will looks up in alarm. He knows that if he ends up with Mr. Mason, there is no guarantee what might become of him. If forced, Will is prepared to run away on his own, perhaps into Wolf Trap Wood. With the creature gone, he is sure he can handle any threat Wolf Trap Wood still holds.

But young Will need not worry.

"I will take him!" Miss. Alana offers immediately, glaring at Mr. Mason. "He needs support and care, and the familiarity of the village, not some unknown place in town."

“I can take him,” Mr. Hobbs says quietly. “I have already spent time with young Will since he was a babe, and I'm already caring for his dogs. Also, he is good friends with my daughter, Abigail.” Mr. Hobb's offer is met with slight disturbing hesitation, as there is a slight eeriness to Mr. Hobbs that makes most villagers wary.

Mayor Purnell hesitates.

“We will take him.”

The firm and strong voice comes from Mrs. Crawford. All eyes stop on her, but she remains resolute. “As you all already know, Will has spent much time with me and my husband. Plus, as you all also know, we are unable to have children of our own. Will has always been the son to me I could not have. We have plenty of love, and all the resources we need to care for Will. Indeed, I agree with the others. He needs the stability of the village right now as well as a mothers care, and a fathers guidance in his life. All three we can provide him.” In complete agreement, and in thought that over his cold dead body would he ever hand any child over to Mr. Mason, Mr. Crawford crouches down once again to look at Will.

“Would you like to come with us son?”

Will looks to Mrs. Crawford who smiles encouragingly at him, then to the gruff Mr. Crawford who has always treated him well, and nods.

“Then he will come live with us.” Mr. Crawford states, moving back to his chair again with a groan. He then turns to Mr. Hobbs. “I would appreciate it however, if you continued to care for the dogs. I know they are special to Will, and he trusts you with them.” Mr. Hobbs gives a nod of acknowledgement with a small smile. Will however, looks up, a small noise escaping.

“I will have Winston of course, returned to you little wolf. You should never have to be separated from such a loyal companion.” Mr. Hobbs immediately says, recognising the reason behind Will's distressed noise with complete understanding. Will gives a very small but grateful smile of relief to Mr. Hobbs, which Mrs. Crawford is relived herself to see. A sign that Will may recover from this incident yet, and perhaps without too many scars.

“Then all is settled.” Mayor Purnell states. “It has been a long and harrowing day, let us all adjourn and rest. Mr. Mason, if you could stay however for a bit longer, so we can discuss better your plans for this creature?”

“Oh of course Mayor Purnell! I'd be delighted to discuss everything with you!” Mr. Mason says gleefully, clapping his hands softly together again. He turns immediately to Mrs. Mason sitting beside him. “Go home!” he says rudely. Mrs Mason jumps, startled at being addressed so suddenly, bows her head, and scurries off. Mr. Crawford watches Mr. Mason carefully. He wants to stay and hear what will be said, but his wound is making him weaker by the second, and Mrs. Crawford is already bundling Will off, wrapped in her arms. Mr. Crawford gives a heavy sigh and follows after his wife and new son. The group leave the Mayor's house.

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Mrs. Crawford puts Will to bed in a little made up cot, as soon as they get home. Their place is a small but homey stoned cottage. Flowering plants adorn the outside and inside tastefully, and Will has always enjoyed its eternal scent ever present. But right now he just feels pain. Both external from the rough treatment and injury on his head, and internal. His brain replays every moment from the moment he woke up, to now in perfect recall and detail. Mrs. Crawford certainly notices that the young boy's eyes seem glazed over and unseeing of the real world. She gives him a dose of pain powder, and soothes the brown curls from his forehead. Will can't sleep. But he does close his eyes to appear so. Though he appreciates the comfort Mrs. Crawford is offering, he just wants to be away from it all. Strangely, he wants to go back to his spot on The Wall, and surrender to the peace he gains being near the wood. But he knows going back will never be the same. Tears prick and burn his eyes as he buries his face into his pillow to hide them. But they remain with him long into the next dawn.

Will remains distant for the next few days. Spending his time resting at the Crawford's home..well...his home now too he supposes. Mrs. Crawford certainly does all she can to make him feel as welcoming as possible, and Will feels uncomfortable with how rude he is being in remaining apathetic. But his mind's eye is committed to the event past, and the confusing guilt that surrounds him from the death of the little white creature, and not Mr. Graham. The last fact proving to add more guilt to Will's already guilty feelings, by the fact that he does not feel all that guilty about it. A vicious circle.

Will doesn't go back to The Wall.

He sleeps a lot. Which is a concern to Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, until Dr. Sutcliffe assures them that this is normal. Miss. Alana supports this fact, both assuring that sleep is a good healer, and that time can help heal the trauma. She visits Will one day, and simply sits with him on the comfy seating. She later tells Mr. and Mrs. Crawford “When people go through something rough in life they take it 'one day at a time', but so does everyone in life, because that is how time works. The best thing do to is be normal around Will” Will overhears and can't deny the logic of it. So when Mr. and Mrs. Crawford start to act as if Will living with them is something that has always happened, it does help him move out of his head. Well, enough so to be functional at the very least.

It doesn't help that Mr. Mason has obviously started his 'testing' of the creature. Sometimes its screams of rage and pain can be heard from right across the village. It fills Will with dread and an icy chill. Mrs. Crawford complains to Mr. Crawford, but nothing can be done. Mayor Purnell says and does nothing, despite some other villages complaining about the horrific noise. When the complaints get too bad, Mr. Mason comes out with holy sermons and reassurances that this is what keeps them safe now. He has apparently gotten in contact with the great holy man of the Great City. A Father Chilton, he is called. Mr. Mason receives a whole carriage full of silver tools, and orders to write and report daily of his findings. So the 'testing' truly begins.

The very first day of testing, Will has his first night terror that night.

Screaming out for some unknown reason, he wakes up drenched in sweat.

Mrs. Crawford rushes to him with motherly affections every time, but the vivid dreams live on. Most consist of Will running and hunting through Wolf Trap Wood, only to come upon the scene of past as he once did so. The earth is soaked in blood and bodies, the little white creature dead, and the red eyes of the black creature, envelope him.

Will cannot get out of his mind that altering moment when the eyes of him and the black creature join, and some sort of link happens between them. It is as if both recognize each other deeply, even though they have never met before. It has unlocked something in Will. A golden sway of motion releases deep inside his brain. Will has always been a perceptive child, but now it is as if things that usually remain unseen by others, flicker across his mind like daydreams without his control. It gives Will head pains which Mrs. Crawford tries to sooth away with tonics and gentle strokes.

But despite all that, children can adapt very well, and so Will, never one to dwell on things unchangeable, moves forward sluggishly. Things get better when Mr. Hobbs brings Winston back to Will. Even Mr. Crawford can see the light sparking in Will's eyes when he sees his furry companion. Winston in turn is overjoyed, sniffing the boy to make sure he is okay, before romping with him playfully.

Years later, after Will has long since deserted from life in the village. The villagers will whisper among themselves, that Mr. Will Graham was only ever truly happy in the village when he was with his dogs. A sure sign that he was more inclined to beast than man, even as a child.

Be that as it may, we will return to young Will, as he continues to live his life.

He still has his friends. Abigail in particular is as solid as stone, as always. He speaks with her before the others, as she and Mr. Hobbs bring the dogs over for a visit. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford remember how bright Will became after Winston's return, and hope for even more positive canine enforcement. The dogs are just as overjoyed as Winston to see Will, which makes sense. Mr. Crawford and Mr. Hobbs make arrangements for the latter to keep the dogs and work with Will in training and breeding more, until such time as Will is grown enough to properly take over the whole business of the dogs. The dogs are still be needed, as there are other predators and things to guard against in the wood and on the road. Not to mention that they are still uncertain if the black creature is the only Wendigo left, or if there are more of its kind. Playing with the dogs and Abigail, Will spies the two talking near the cottage.

“You'll be the next dog handler.” Abigail states bluntly.

Will sighs, “That's not a position Abie.” Abigail is pleased to hear her nickname from Will. Though she will never say anything, she was very worried for a time about him, only hearing rumors of the event that happened outside The Wall. Constantly asking after him from her father. Mr. Hobbs finally puts a rest to it by stating “Young Will has the body of a boy but the spirit of a wolf. All young cubs must face adversity to grow into a strong hunter. Will has the makings of a good hunter, he will prevail.”

“Like me?” Abigail had cheekily asked, feeling reassured that her father knew what he was talking about. She remembers her father had looked at her with possessive eyes, and had reached out to stroke her cheek.

“Yes. A female can be one of the most deadly of hunters. You are my pride, and will become a great huntress one day, if not already.”

Abigail had beamed proudly.

She considers her childhood friend before her. She is never one skirt around an issue, a fact that Will seems to always appreciate.

“Do you miss your father?”

Will stops pulling at the stick in one of the dogs mouths, and stares off into the distance, Mr. Graham's torn and bloody body appearing in his minds eye in an instant.

“No.”

Abigail nods, understanding.

“Do you hate the black creature?”

Will pauses again.

“No.”

Abigail tilts her head to the side. Then, a large eager smile spreads across her face. She goes over to Will and sits right in front of him, on her knees. Will's eyes widen in surprise as Abigail shifts her upper body forward.

“Tell me about the black creature, everything. What did it look like? How it was, what it was like. I wanna know everything. And about the white creature too. They won't let me see either of them, though I've asked father many times. Was it pretty? What happened Will? You told me about your visits to The Wall. Was that how it happened?”

Will's eyes go almost impossibly round from Abigail's rush of questions. He freezes as more images rush before his eyes with no order. Seeing Will freeze, Abigail sits back, a little uncertain now. Worried if her questioning has in the end, upset her friend. But she has nothing to worry about. Will feels as if a weight has been lifted from him, he sits forward and the words seem to pour from him. Meeting the little white creature, his leaving her presents, and that terrifying dawn where he finally met the black creature, which killed his father. Will didn't realize it before, but he needs to tell someone about it. Tell the truth through his mind. Tell someone who might understand his confusion, at least a little.

Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, and Mr. Hobbs watch the two young children as they sit knee to knee, face to face, and talk as if in a world of their own. It is the most animated the former adults have ever seen of Will since the event. They are pleased.

“Good to see Will with a friend, and moving on from that event with the black creature.” Mr. Crawford comments gruffly.

Mrs. Crawford makes happy noises of agreement, whereas Mr. Hobbs merely hums, a knowing smile on his face as he sees Abigail ask Will a curious question, and Will's eyes

look down in remembrance before answering.

The rest of the children in the village however, deal a bit differently with Will. Some avoid him as something that has been defiled by the black creature. Since they usually ignore Will anyway, there is no change. Will hates most the pity looks he receives, the glances, especially off the older children that speak of overly sweet sympathies. Some children go the other way, to tease and bully Will more, adding on the fact that he is now parent-less and a orphan. Funny enough, it is not the taunts about his father that get Will into scuffles and childish brawls, but the nasty comments about the little white creatures death. Implanting descriptive imagined terrors with sick glee of how the creature was supposedly torn apart by the dogs. Add to the fact that Will hears almost every moment the painful roars of the black creature at the hands of Mr. Mason, and Will snaps. This is another case of concern for Mr. and Mrs. Crawford. Will's friend Jimmy, often steps in with Will in the scuffles, earning a good lecture and swift cuff off Mam Bev. The stern mother being one of the only adults who never treats Will any differently, either then, nor after the other events to come that scar Will. Will will always remember Mam Bev with affection. Brian, grows a little distant from Will, but still hangs around the group nonetheless. Molly, hugs Will upon first seeing him again, her nature of soft worry an innocent balm. Will feels very protective of her now. As if seeing the darkness of the abyss through the event, has taught him to protect better those which the abyss has yet to touch. He certainly makes more of an effort to treat Molly with kindness, behavior which makes the young girl simply delighted and overjoyed. Abigail meets every extra stumbling gentlemanly action made by Will, with an eye roll or a small snort, earning her a stern look she finds hard not to giggle at.

But there are still questions that dwell in the eyes of the other villagers young and old, questions that will always be left unasked and whispered about to others with sneaking glances at Will. It grants Will an inquisitiveness to know better the answers to those questions he sees himself. Will's talk with Abigail gives him a direction to go. He finds himself sneaking away one evening to see Miss. Alana in private, to ask about the Wendigo. Miss. Alana is surprised but tells Will what she knows. She also draws the disapproval of many when the next day, she visits Will at Mr. and Mrs. Crawford's, bringing him not just some extra school work, Will being an exceptional student, but the book she has which contains information about the legend of the Wendigo. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford thinks it inelegant and upsetting to give Will such a book, encouraging him to think about the creature that killed his father. But Miss. Alana assures them that knowing about the creature can help Will heal, and answer many inner questions he may have. Will pours over the contents of the book, reading with single minded abandon about the Wendigo. Committing his own experiences with what is written in the pages. Unfortunately, it ends up making Will irritable. As an itchy yearning to see the black creature once again, tickles in Will's mind. It brings about feelings of sorrow, fear, and curiosity, to see if that moment passed between them was simply circumstance or a true understanding. Of course, Will will later remember this part of his life and recognise it for what it is, the birth of the egg of possibility that has been born between Will and the Wendigo. But for now, to a child, it is an uncontrollable impulse and urge, much like the one that made Will return to his spot on The Wall each night. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford see how irritable and absent minded Will is getting, ever thinking about something they both can't, and don't want to understand.

They confiscate the book.

But the thoughts have already been planted in Will's young mind.

They take root and grow one evening as the children gather and play in the middle of the village center. Will is absently petting Winston, trying to get him to do a new trick, while Jimmy is playing a game of ball with Brian. Molly is making flower chains out of the newly sprung flowers with the other village girls, as the days grow warmer. Abigail sits just outside of the little girl group, plaiting straps of leather for a purpose unasked by Will.

Suddenly a familiar, but no less disturbing sound is heard from a place on the right end of the village. All children and adults stop still, and turn towards Mr. Mason's residence. Will feels the painful roar heard sink deep down into his bones.

The black creature.

A few mutters are made by a few, then the village continues on, life rushing back, children continue in their playing, and yelps and cries of happy fun fill the air once more. Only Will remains motionless, unresponsive to Winston's snuffles and nudges. Molly notices Will's reaction, and straight away rises as gracefully as a child can and moves to sit by him.

“Are you alright Will?” she asks, gently touching his shoulder.

Will gives himself a little shake to purge the images in his inner eye.

“Yeah, I'm fine.” He gives her an only slightly strained smile.

“Will probably gets scared when he hears that nasty noise the creature makes because it killed Mr. Graham.” Jimmy states absently while kicking the ball back to Brian.

“Jimmy....” Brian hisses at him, letting the ball roll away.

“What?” Jimmy looks around with wide eyes “We're all thinking it.”

Brian glares once more at his brother, then runs off to fetch his ball. Will simply raises his eyebrow at Jimmy, who has the decency to flush a little in embarrassment and kick at the dirt grass under his feet. “Well it's true,” he says defiantly looking up straight at Will “And we all know Mr. Graham wasn't that much of a nice man, I'm glad you're with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford now....not meaning any disrespect to you're father, but....we all heard the rumor of what happened.....” Jimmy trails off.

“Perhaps Will doesn't want to be reminded anymore.” Molly comments softly.

“Hard to when you hear that noise right clear across the village.” Brian snips, having retrieved his ball. Molly nods sadly in agreement.

“I'm okay, really.” Will says. He gives Jimmy a friendly smile which the boy reciprocates. Will prefers Jimmy's way of saying things without thinking. Will had read in a book once 'value the person who speaks the truth, for they are few and far in between.' Will knows that for a fact to be true.

“Has any of you besides Will seen the creature?” Abigail asks, joining the group with the strips of leather in her hands. Will vaguely recognizes the beginnings of a dog lead. The rest of the group all shake their heads.

“Well I heard...”

The group all roll their eyes and give silent moans at the words. Frederica and Freddie, probably sensing gossip, skirts over to the group. It was Freddie that had spoke.

“I heard that they are testing what will hurt the creature and plan on not killing it for ages and ages.” He nods, while licking his lips.

“I heard that they are feeding it raw meat from the cow, and having someone cut themselves for human blood to keep it alive.” Frederica adds with a smile of smug knowledge.

“Mr. Mason would never.” Molly exclaims, shocked.

“Would too!” both twins state.

Will places his hand on Molly's in a show of support, a gesture that seems well appreciated and he does a little more often for that reason these days. He does notice with a bit of curiosity that while the rest of the group turn to scoff at the twins, Brian is looking at Will and Molly.

“Do you think that it truly is a creature not of this world?” Franklyn waddles up to ask. Brian comments dryly, “If it wasn't of this world then it wouldn't be alive here, Franklyn.” Franklyn seems to deflate at that.

“Well Miss. Alana did say that it is a rare creature, when we asked her about it in class.” Molly says.

“She also said that no one should ever go near it, chains or no.” Jimmy says. “So who wants to go and see it?” He adds straight after with a cheerful grin.

“No, thank you.” Molly replies.

“Besides, no one is allowed near there. I tried to get my father to sneak me in but even he won't let me.” Abigail says mournfully.

“We could get in.” The twins chimes.

“Could you?” Franklyn asks wide eyes and adoring.

“Could not!” Abigail snaps at the twins

“Could too!”

“Could not!”

Will absently pats Winston who has flopped down beside him with his head on Will's lap. His mind searching for what he knows about Mr. Mason's residence.

“I have seen the creature. It is evolving and changing under the purification my father is doing.” A lisped voice comments softly.

Everyone looks at Francis, Mr. Mason's son. A tall boy, and very strong and solid for his age. He speaks with a slight lisp due to a cleft in his upper lip, the result of an accident in a fall in the kitchen. Though Frederica swears that she has heard that Mr. Mason had done it to his own son when he was little, as a punishment for blaspheme against the holy light that one time. Either way, Francis is still a bully, and makes a habit of lording over the other children.

“What do you mean Francis?” Reba, the miller's daughter asks from over by the group of girls Molly had vacated from. Only Reba seems to be allowed to speak to Francis without permission. Will has overheard Francis telling his brother to never hurt her, because she is the 'sun'.

Francis gives a sneer “You all owe my father awe for the work he is doing. Through it, you are privy to a great enlightenment. He will vanquish the creature back to the depths and get stronger. He can protect this village better than the stupid vapid villagers here with their spears and torches. Or your dogs.” Francis turns his sneer towards Will and Winston. The latter who growls protectively, and has to be quietened by Will's firm hand.

Will glares back at Francis. “You forget that I have seen the Wendigo too. It seems old and every bit as ancient as your holy light. I'm sure it is much stronger than to die at the hands of us men.” Will is only half sure of his statement. Part of him says it to rankle Francis, the other part lies in dark hidden hope that the creature will survive Mr. Mason. If only so Will can see it alive again.

Francis puffs up like a dragon “You say its name which gives it power! You are a stupid little boy and know nothing! My father told me you should've been sent into town, to the holy orphanage to learn the true teachings and guidance. Perhaps then your stupid mind might grasp the meaning of your pitiful life.”

“And what IS that meaning Francis?” Will challenges.

“To serve and give yourself up to the holy light. My father will follow the way of a great becoming, you'll see it true!” Francis growls at the younger boy.

“You're father will fail.” Will's voice is soft but strong. Francis' eyes seem to glow red with pure anger at Will. Everyone in the group is tense, sensing yet another brawl about to happen between Francis and Will. Being the smaller of the two boys, Will always loses, and enda up eating dirt like the little 'piggie' he is. But Will is swift and smart and in the past two fights, has managed to hold his own enough to bruise and crack a nose. Their tension dissipates at the sound of another soft but rough voice.

“Leave be Francis. There is no pride in beating a weaker being.”

This voice belongs to Randall Verger. A tall boy much like his brother. Randall is much narrower, with a pointed look and needle eyes. He is wearing rich pelt furs, even in the warmer weather. All the village kids keep clear of Randall, Will included...well when the former allows him to be clear. Randall is usually much quieter than his brother, he is the one that will attack out of nowhere and has sent many village kids home to their folks with broken noses and limbs. Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Graham also often catches him sneaking around Wolf Trap Wood, killing small animals. But being the son of Mr. Mason, Randall is never punished, no matter how many fights he starts with the bigger boys, or times he is caught in the wood. Will was once friends with Randall, sort of. Randall had apparently seen a kindred spirit in Will, Will's link to the dogs, wolves, and the wood. But when Will made it clear he had no desire to become 'alpha dog' in the village with him, Randall turned on him and broke his leg. They have been enemies ever since.

Randall gives Will a sneer as he approaches. “Father spoke of how you fainted in fear from the little creature. WEAK!” he spits the last. Will bristles but says nothing, he was taught at a young age to not rankle a rabid animal.

“If I was there I would've taken it down myself. There is no pride in beating a creature in a cage. It should be made free to roam and begin the hunt. Only one can survive.”

“That is blaspheme Randall!” Francis turns on his brother. “What father is doing is better, the creature will rise from the ashes and be reborn into the holy light.”

Randall ignores his brother, “The ones killed by it were weak. Those underneath it deserve to be dead, even your pathetic father Will.” Randal murmurs softly, completely in contrast to his harsh words, which make it even more frustrating to hear.

“You could not have taken it Randall! You are no predator, it took a whole group of big male villagers and a special cross bow to take the creature down. What could you have possibly done?” Abigail bravely stands up. The silent deadly look Randall gives her, makes even the courageous Abigail step back. “I know how more than you.” Randal replies. “You are nothing but a broken dog begging your father for scraps.” Abigail's eyes flash with hurt. Irritation and righteous anger fill Will then, and he takes it upon himself to stand in front of Abigail, and look Randall straight in the eye.

“You are incomplete Randall.” Will has no idea where these words are coming from that come out of his mouth. It is as if the images flashing inside his brain are transmuted into words, and those words made truth by his voice. Even Randall's eyes widen as he sees something he has never seen before in the younger boy, something that he had sensed when they were younger but is peeking out now. The ability to see deep into ones very soul.

“You are human like the rest of us but it shames you. You want to burst free of your skin, but you can't. You can't become the black creature. You can't become his equal. You can't become more.”

“I can.” Randall hisses, quiet rage filling him at the truth in Will's words.

“Then go on. I dare you. Look into the eyes of a true predator and not flinch in fear like the rest of us. Look at it and see that you are the inferior one this time.”

Randall walks up to Will, his face mere centimeters away, both boys eyes burning, breath mingling. “You will see Will Graham. You underestimate me and what I will become. You don't know what I have been doing to prepare myself. You think you are a hunter? Then I DARE YOU. Go on. I dare you to face the creature again and know you are the one that is weak.” Randall's voice is a whisper. He steps back and looks around at the group and the other village children who have stopped to watch the interaction. “You will all see.” Randal whispers again, before turning and walking away. Francis gives one more sneer towards the group before following after his brother.

For a moment no one moves, and then a relieved sigh goes through the group. Molly presses a hand to her chest. “They always scare me so much” she says, moving up to Will and placing her other small comforting hand on his arm.

“Yeah, they definitely give me the heebie jeebies.” Jimmy agrees with a small shudder.

“They are just bullies. “ Abigail states tactfully.

“Maybe, but they still hurt when they beat on you.” Will comments. He reaches a hand out and pats Winston's fur, the dog has move loyally to his masters side when Will had confronted Randall. Will gives him a small piece of jerky he has hidden in his pocket as a treat.

“True. But only YOU are that stupid to keep standing up to them Will.” Jimmy says cheerfully.

“Let them do as they want.” Brian complains. “There is no reason to get into that lot. The whole family is insane.”

Agreement hums are made all around, as the group settles back into their activities before their spat with the Verger brothers. Molly is showing Franklyn with great patience, how to make flower chains. Brain and Jimmy continue playing ball. Only Abigail senses something is up with Will, who is patting Winston again but has his eyes trained on where Randall and Francis have gone in the direction back to their home.

“Will?” Abigail calls.

“Hmmmm?” Will answers absently.

“You're not going to take his dare are you? Try and go see the black creature?”

“You can't Will!” Molly cries, moving up to sit by him again, and this time places both hands on his, as if she can restrain him herself. Franklyn is looking at him in both parts, awe and fear.

“Not even Will is that stupid.” Jimmy comments.

“He wouldn't even make it two steps near anyways.” Brian adds.

But Will is indeed that stupid, and this would not be a very long story if Will had let a simple thing such as Mr. Mason's guards, deter him from the seed of impulse that has now grown

inside him.

“Promise me Will!” Molly says, shaking Will's arm. “Promise me you won't go near that dangerous thing!”

Will shakes himself from his inner mind, to instead focus on Molly, giving her what he hopes is a reassuring smile. He places his hand on top of hers. “I promise Molly.” Looking at Will carefully to see any signs of deception, Will is saved by Winston pushing his snout in between the two of them with a snuffle, and licking at Molly's face, making the young girl giggle helplessly. The two rain affection on the happy dog and the topic of Will's dare is forgotten. Only Abigail keeps a close eye on Will for the hour they are together before they all disperse for supper.

Later that night, if Mr. and Mrs. Crawford notice that Will is being far to quiet even for him at supper, they pay no heed. They are already adapting to Will's odd behavior, the boy seeming in daydream world more often than not since his fathers death. That night, Will lies in his cot as thoughts, as always, swirl in his mind. Dominating everything is the remembered moment between him and the black creature. Will knows what he has to do, he knows where his mind and everything in him is pointing to. It is no coincidence that it is WILL who was drawn to Wood Trap Wood even after The Wall was built, it was WILL who met the little white creature first and befriended it, and it was WILL who for some unknown reason, had tried to hinder his father and stop the attack on the white and black creatures. It was also WILL who has had that moment with the black creature. He remembers it's eyes. It hadn't seemed rage filled when it had looked at Will, more....curious... Will realizes in an epiphany.

Will has lied to Molly. Though he feels no guilt over it, he sees it as merely giving her peace of mind. He will also not tell anyone, especially Mr. and Mrs. Crawford. He can't even tell Abigail of his plans. Plus, he adds in a bit of dark humor, he has been dared.

There is nothing left for Will in Wolf Trap Wood anymore.

He won't return to his spot in The Wall.

Will is going to sneak into the Verger household.

Will is going to go see the black creature again.

And so he does....

Caterpillar

Chapter Summary

Once upon a time, in the village Maryland. A Wendigo is born.

How did it come to be you ask?
Well, through love.
But why?
Well come along then....come along...
Let me show you...
As we continue in our story....

Chapter Notes

Oh my, I have been so so rude, and I can only say I am so so sorry for leaving you so long without writing another chapter. I could not believe that it has been four whole years since I have updated. Unfortunately, life and family can make the creative juices stall, and to be honest I would much rather write a good next chapter after this long and make it worth your while, than put up a mediocre chapter that i'll probably re-write again. I can only hope this very long chapter can help sooth any irritated feelings.
As usual, I read a lot of Hannigram fics so if there are any similarities, I don't mean to copy you. This story is written of my own thoughts and ideas.
This story does contain a man/beast relationship, if this bothers you I suggest you do not read it, it will get explicit eventually. Also, I have nothing against faith or religion. The character here is based on a negative imagined faith, and the story is more about the individual's actions and wrong in using religion as an excuse.
Comments and feedback are the food for writing. Please let me know what you think. Trollers are rude and are not welcome.
I have proofread and edited this fic myself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

True of fate and time...
A bond soon to shine...
The boy and the Wendigo.

Chapter Two: Caterpillar

There is nothing left for Will in Wolf Trap Wood anymore.
He will not return to his spot in The Wall.
Will is going to sneak into the Verger household.
Will is going to go see the black creature again.

And so he does....

Eventually....

Will is not so naive as to think that he will be able to gain access to the Wendigo, should he simply go up and ask Mr. Mason nicely. Will knows of Mr. Mason's dislike of him. He remembers Mr. Mason's eager and pushing words to send him to the holy light's orphanage in the Great City. Will is not exaggerating when he thinks he would rather take his chances in Wolf Trap Wood. The wood is somewhat diminished now, lacking the dark throb of the Wendigo's presence. It is no less beautiful, nor less dangerous.

It simply seems...empty.

The next day Will starts making his plans to infiltrate Mr. Mason's property. In the spare time he can get for the next days, he makes his way closer and closer to the residence, and the cabin holding the Wendigo. Getting closer to the Verger residence in itself is a difficult task. Mr. Mason has double guards now for the black creature, and a small boy scurrying around can be very noticeable to some. Will, at the start is only vaguely aware of the layabout of Mr. Mason's large house. Most children having avoid going near not just from Mr. Mason, but from his sons.

Two days after Will makes his decision. He speaks to Reba, Francis's only true acquaintance. Will hesitates to say friend.

Only Reba has actually been inside Mr. Mason's property, by invitation of Francis. Lying by omission his true purpose, he pleads curiosity. In the end, he learns very little. Reba having only been invited into the sitting area of the main house, and has seen no other rooms, nor been shown anywhere else on the property. To make things worse, Francis catches Will speaking with her, and Will is promptly given a black eye from the jealous boy for his efforts.

That evening, Mr. Crawford only quirks his eyebrow at Will's explanation of his injury, shaking his head with a soft snort at the 'folly of youth', while Mrs. Crawford tuts around the boy, holding a piece of raw meat to his face.

During this time of Will's determination to see the Wendigo and his future actual visits....

Because of course he eventually gets to see the Wendigo, we would be foolish as to assume the story falls otherwise.

Will feels a little unsettled about how easy it is in tricking Mr. and Mrs. Crawford about his doings and whereabouts. At first thought, Will assumes it would be difficult. But no. Will simply pulls on his good boy face like a second mask, making sure to return in time before

dawn, so the Crawford's don't catch him. Using Winston and visits with Abigail to explain away any long absences in the day. Now more than ever, Will feels incomplete and lonely. The face he shows to the village and his friends not the true one. He feels almost a type of hunger to lay sight on the Wendigo, to know for sure the truth between them.

Only Abigail suspects, Will catching her more than once looking at him strangely. He can correctly guess as to her thoughts that she suspects Will's scheming. But Abigail tells no one, for such is the loyalty of friendship. She worries however, for she senses it for what it is.

Will's first movement away from the life he might have, and towards a different path.

But we are yet again getting ahead of ourselves. Will is yet to see the Wendigo. He is, at this point in time, trying to gain access to the Verger place. Yet another obstacle appears before Will, this time in the form of the other Verger son. Randall.

Unknown before to Will. Randal is starting to get in touch with his more animal nature, and prowls around his home regularly. When Will finally manages to sneak onto Verger land undetected, he is caught by Randall. Shocked at the presence of the Verger child before him, covered in moss, fur, and armed with sharp silver knives Will cannot possibly know where Randal received them from. Randall growls at him questioning, his presence there, Will uses all of his dwindling wits and smarts to answer.

“Um...uh...huh..”

Randall growls louder “You were trying to get the better of me weren't you!?! You were trying to attack me unaware! But I am getting stronger, and nothing can stop my progression!”

Strange words to come from a young boy.

Will limps away to the village clinic, where he knows Mrs. Crawford is still aiding Dr. Sutcliffe. He walks in with another black eye, cuts, bruises, and a broken arm. This time, Mr. Crawford scolds Will soundly.

“Stay away from the Verger boys Will! I do not care what or how they do or say things. I won't have you coming back to us black and blue again!”

Mrs. Crawford does not say anything to Will, just looks at him with sad worried eyes.

Will prefers Mr. Crawford's scolding.

Nevertheless, he is irritated with himself.

His broken arm will take many days to heal proper, and further hindering his attempts to get onto the Verger property and see the Wendigo. Will is not stupid enough to try and physically sneak around with a broken arm. The next few days, he surrenders his state to teasing off his friends, and the soft aid and cheerful soothing of Molly.

In the end it is Molly however that helps him in a way she is clueless about. Will and friends are sitting together after school, when Molly happily relates to the group that her folks, Mr.

and Mrs. Foster, might have found a new herb in the woods. The group all make noises of happiness and congratulations.

“They are not sure what it is exactly, nor what its properties are, but they are hopeful it is something useful as there is quite a bit of it grown.”

“It was in the more west part of the wood was it? Father was telling me yesterday.” Abigail inquires.

“Yes.” Molly confirms “They took a bit to Mr. and Mrs. Madchen, so they can draw and copy it, and record where it is found.”

Will stops listening after that.

The record keepers.

The Madchen's.

That night, Will arises once Mr. and Mrs. Crawford are asleep, and sneaks out of the house as best he can.

He heads towards the Madchen's place. Next to Mr. and Mrs. Madchen's wooden house, a stone structure stands. Inside is all the kept written records of the village. For paper in those days is precious and not so available for loose use. The structure is stone to help protect the paper records inside from potential fire. It also contains no windows as to protect from other elements, so Will is not afraid of being seen once inside. The only door in and out is guarded by a large bred dog. The dog arises and growls in warning at Will's approach. However, a soft whistle from Will has the dog cocking his head to the side, lying back down again. Will trains with almost all the dogs in the village. Winston, who as usual follows along with Will in his nighttime activities, lies down comfortably next to the other dog. Both dogs content in furry company. Years of practice allows Will to pick at the rusty lock on the door and let himself inside.

It is dusty and dark, and Will is careful as he awkwardly lights a lamp. With his arm still bound, the act takes some time and very slow clumsy movements. Soon it is lit and Will searches the stacked room full of leather bound books and lose papers held together by string. It takes more time before he finds what he is after. Drawings of the village, including where people are located, and a drawing of the Verger property. Will may not be able to take the drawings out of the place, and he can't draw good copies thanks to his broken arm. But he can memorise them. It takes two more visits before he is satisfied with his memorising of the village. In his last visit, Will even finds documents on the Wendigo, newly written. But there is nothing there that he does not already know. Having already a while ago, read all of Miss. Alana's books on the Wendigo.

So Will waits his days in silent frustration as his arm heals.

Almost everyday he hears the pained roars of the Wendigo as it undertakes 'tests' from Mr. Mason. Will's heart bleeds out for the Wendigo, and he can only just manage to stop himself from doing something drastic, and forego his planning. What that drastic action might be he

has no idea, he only knows that he hates Mr. Mason for what he is doing. Will doesn't even wonder at how possessive his feelings are becoming about the Wendigo, determined in his thoughts that seeing the Wendigo again will hold the answers he wants.

Another added trouble is his avoiding of Randall and Francis. It seems Will's earlier interactions with them have put them on edge, and avoidance is easier said than done. Though neither boy breaks anymore bones, a fact which Will is grateful for, they step up in their bullying.

They call him names, push at him, and even spit on him. Only Will's bigger goal keeps him from retaliating. That and a good friend in Jimmy who ends up throwing himself onto Francis, fists waving when he sees Will being spat at. Will joins him after that of course, for one can excuse it as self defence of a friend. More bruises and cuts later sees them both in front of a stern and disapproving Mam Bev, who cuffs them soundly until Will manages to get out why Jimmy acted as he did. The new information results in a snort of exasperation, but an end to the cuffing. Followed by cakes hard and almost indigestible, but tasty after sucking on them a little. A new recipe.

Francis eases off, but Randall continues to watch Will carefully. Much like assessing an opponent for an attack.

Time goes by and Will's arm heals. Thanks to the documents he has memorised and patient watching, he manages to find a gap in the village watch and moves closer towards the cabin. At first glance, it is an impossible task to get inside. The only way in and out of the cabin is the front door, guarded by the village watch. Will cannot simply sneak by uncontested like he did with the dog at the Madchen's. Will can't whistle at the guard to let him go in either. Plus, there is no guarantee someone is not inside, although Will doubts it. No village man wishes to be anywhere near the Wendigo. Will waits night after night, watching and learning by the cabin, for a way, any way, for him to get inside. The endless nights make him sleepy in the day. He falls asleep during class with Miss. Alana, waking up to giggling and chuckling. Miss. Alana standing in front of him with her hands on her slim hips, a mock scowl on her face.

“So nice of you to join us in the land of the open eyed Will.”

Will takes the jibes and laughter with good nature, and tries his hardest to stay awake in future. Falling asleep at the dinner table with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford makes the latter tut in matronly fashion, and send Will to his cot early. That works for him anyway, as he allows himself a little bit more sleep before his nighttime activities. Winston consistently comes with him on these outings of course. Though Will does tell his loyal companion to wait for him a little further away from the Verger property. The last thing he needs is for Winston to get caught by Randall, who is still annoyingly prowling around at night. Sometimes, Randall does not prowl the property. Will suspects that on those nights Randall sneaks out into Wolf Trap Wood like he did before The Wall. This too works in Will's favour, as Will has no desire to be near the wood with the Wendigo here in the village.

Another two months go by.

Will spends all his time in a clockwork schedule. He will wake up, eat breakfast with the Crawford's, spend some time training Winston before walking to Abigail's house. He will spend time training and taking care of the dogs with Mr. Hobb's, then walk with Abigail to school. After school, he will spend time with his friends, then walk with Abigail back to her house, where he will again tend to the dogs with Mr. Hobbs. Then he will go home, play with Winston, and eat with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford. After talking with then a while, sometimes he makes fishing lures with Mr. Crawford, he is sent to bed by Mrs. Crawford once he starts to yawn. He will sleep awhile, then go out to his nighttime activities.

Then repeat.

Will is beginning to memorise each change in village watch duty around the cabin. Which man is more likely to become lax in his attention and duty, and those who are extra attentive. Which ones have dogs with him, that Will will have to quietly silence. How each man walks and his pattern of patrol, whom is more likely to walk randomly as apposed to who will walk the same pattern over and over again. Will has no fear of Mr. Mason arriving in the night to oversee. The man seems content to keep to his home after the evening passes and not bother the creature until late morning or the evening that next day. Will deduces that not even the best of Mr. Mason's sermons will be able to sooth the villagers if the Wendigo's roars are heard in the dead of night, keeping everyone awake. Either that, or Mr. Mason is a man who just likes his beauty sleep. In the time when not at school, Will consistently splits his time between, fishing, the dogs, his friends, and scouting the cabin.

In the end, it is the many months spent dedicated to his goal and his vigilance that rewards Will opportunity to visit the Wendigo. The villagers seemingly assured that the Wendigo will never escape its cage. The guarding village watch men, even the most attentive, relaxing a little, more inclined to spend time talking to each other rather than guard a creature they know will never get out of its cage.

Or so they assume.

But for now, it is a factor that works in Will's favour. As if the very fabric of the world is easing the way for the boy and the Wendigo to meet again.

The cold Autumn morning just over two seasons since the Wendigo is captured, Will wakes determined to see his plan in action. He knows everything, he is prepared for every situation.

It is time.

That day, Will can barely hold onto his anticipation and eagerness. His friends comment on his mood, much like that of a puppy trembling with energy, waiting to pounce. Will shrugs off their attention, and his friends shrug in return, simply happy that he is happy. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford is surprised that night when Will begs a tiredness he clearly isn't showing and retires to his cot early. Sharing a look of bewilderment between them about the strangeness of children, they end the look with a smile of fondness. Thanking whatever powers that be that has gifted them with the precious young boy. His presence lifting the feeling in the house immensely since his adoption, spying with shared smiles the beautiful sight of Will curled asleep in his cot, Winston curled up beside him.

The dog is of course, not allowed in the cot at night.

Will slowly rises when he hears the telltale snores and snuffles of Mr. Crawford. He is again impressed by Mrs. Crawford's ability to sleep while Mr. Crawford snores like a boar. Habituation at its finest. Will follows the familiar route to the cabin. Hiding inside the shadows of stone, wood and nature, following the shadows as they dance, flitting from each to the next. Winston, an ever closer shadow just as stealthy behind him. Will reaches the cabin soon enough. What he spies is the perfect scenario. Boyle and Peter are on watch tonight. Boyle, an arrogant man if their ever is one. Peter a kindly man, in charge of the village horses. An accident from a horse kick to the head creates in Peter a stutter and a twitch, but his care of the beasts is still unrivalled. Will makes his way over to the cabin, using the shadows made from the half moon above to hide him.

Will waits.

Peter and Boyle walk around the cabin.

Will's heart is beating loudly in his chest, he can barely breath.

Boyle grumbles loudly to Peter before sending the man scurrying away for something to ease their parched throats.

Thump..thump..thump, goes Will's heart in his throat, anxious liquid in his veins.

Boyle stomps at the earth beneath his feet and grumbles, glaring after Peter.

Will knows the rest of the watch are standing closer to the main home beyond the pens of livestock and in the stable. Talking, playing coin games, and drinking, they never let anyone know about their lack of guarding, only popping out here and again for short patrols. It is where Peter is right now.

One man left.

Boyle starts to pace around the cabin, stamping to keep warm.

Upon his steps facing away from Will, the boy sprints quietly and quickly to the closest pen, hiding behind a post. Nearer and nearer he gets.

Boyle coughs and grunts, glaring over at the stable, its location slightly around the vision line of the entrance to the cabin.

Will's breath catches in his throat. His head is full and stuffy, yet hyper aware of everything around him, the wind, the man yonder hindering him to his goal, the familiar burning pain in his legs of squatting still so long.

Boyle keeps looking around towards the stable.

Any moment now.

Will holds his breath thrumming with anticipation.

Boyle looks to the stable again annoyed.

Will tenses.

Boyle finally looks again, before with a grumble walks around the cabin and a little towards the stable hissing with annoyance Peter's name.

NOW.....

NO!!!

Will just manages to stop his throwing of himself forward, heels skidding out, jerking himself back on his butt when he spies something about the cabin he did not yet consider.

A padlock on the door.

Will's eyes bulge out of his head, his stomach drops like a rock, and he curses himself five kinds of idiot fool. Of course it would be locked. His mind works ten miles a minute. Will is going to need the key. His own little bits of metal not enough to pick open such a large padlock. Will thinks quickly. He will have to steal the key, but how? Going inside the house to find Mr. Mason's copy is asking to be caught, and he can't steal them from any of the men watching the cabin, he is not a pickpocket. The keys are also returned to Mr. Mason when not in use by a villager guard. Swapping hands to each man on watch around the cabin, supposedly four in total. Will is going to have to risk it, and try to steal one from the two not so watchful men that decide to stay in the stable usually.

He sneaks towards there, hiding against the stables side wall, small and unobtrusive. He sneaks a peek inside one of the two large open stable doors, and what he sees reassures him. The men there are playing games and drinking on hay bale's. A small pile of crossbows, spears, and two belt sets with keys are on a stable bench about a quarter of a way inside. Peter is no longer with them. Unfortunately, Will sees no way of getting to the key belts without being seen, as there is no cover in such a space. Dying embers of torchlight flicker shadows over the area.

Will despairs.

He doesn't want to give up, can't give up. Not now, not so close. Not when all that stands between him and the Wendigo is a large bit of wood and an annoying piece of locked metal. Looking up, Will senses dawn is approaching, the crispness of dew and the sky turning lighter with a touch of purple to deep blue. He will have to return back soon or get caught.

The men start to yawn. The next shift and change of watch will happen soon. Will waits and waits. Soon he can hear other village men arrive for duty. It is only by pure luck that they arrive to the opposite doorway from Will's location. The men come forward and banter together, the previous guards relating to the newcomers he uneventful shift, and the small spat between Peter and Boyle, when Peter did not return with Boyle's wineskin.

It is now or never.

It is said that when you expect to see nothing, especially a small boy in Mr. Mason's stables, you see nothing. This fact is put in play as Will sneaks forward while the village men are distracted, and quickly, with fear and shaking fingers which do not move fast enough for his liking, each jingle of metal a death sentence, removes a key from a belt and rushes back in a mad dash to the stable opening and the safety of outside. One villager thinks he sees something out of his peripheral eye and looks to the hay bale of weapons. Seeing nothing but the usual, he inner shrugs and turns back to laugh at another villagers teased misfortune with his wife.

Just outside the door to the stable, Will breaths heavily, almost panting. Standing with his back flat to the wooden wall, eyes closed, head tilted back with exhausted relief.

But he must return home now, as dawn is just beginning. He clutches his prize key to his chest and rushes back quick as he can. Once at a safe distance, he runs back to the cottage, running past Winston who gives out a soft huff at his masters sudden appearance, loping happily after him. Once at the cottage, the boy shoves the key into his pocket and opens the door. Dread filling him at the smell of cooked meat, egg and bread, and the sight of Mrs. Crawford already at the kitchen and Mr. Crawford at the table.

“Will.” Mrs. Crawford greets the boy with a furrowed brow. “You were out of your cot very early this morning.” Mr. Crawford looks up to the panting boy. His cheeks flushed and eyes wide, clearly the look of a boy running for his life.

Will stalls for a moment before he slams his mask in place, adopting his best good boy smile and says breathlessly. “Winston woke me up early this morning wanting to go potty.” Will makes his whole body shrug in helpless boyhood innocence. “It's such a nice morning, we played a little.”

As if on cue, Winston chooses that moment to barrel past Will and make a beeline straight towards Mrs. Crawford and the cooking food. The dog snuffles up and half jumps to get at the tasty smells. Laughing in delighted irritation, Mrs. Crawford orders

“Down Winston! Down!”

But Winston stays, panting happily. Normally a very good behaved dog, one who never jumps, it is a little unusual he would now, high on the rare morning run with his master. But no one argues typical dog behaviour from a dog, so this small change goes by unchallenged. Mr. Crawford smiles as the Will flops himself down into a chair. He knows the boy sneaks out at night, he too was a boy once. Plus with the Wendigo caught, there is no threat out there he is sure the boy can't handle. Even if the boy returns to his trips just outside The Wall.

His smile grows wider when Will catches him looking.

After Will completes his morning greeting to Mrs. Crawford and small banter on Winston's antics, Mr. Crawford simply states his desire for a fishing day with Will to the village pond. Will agrees immediately as Mr. Crawford is sure he would.

The boy loves to fish.

Will converses with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford that morning happily. The metal key in his pocket a searing burning coal of sensed satisfaction on his thigh.

While Will eats with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, over at the stable of Mr. Mason, the villager man only now discovers that his key is missing. Frantic and anxious, he searches and searches, his fellow village men catching onto his anxiety and panic as he worriedly tells them what has gone missing. All dread the possibility of reporting the missing key back to Mr. Mason, an erratic and violent man in truth underneath his holy ways. Quick panicked whispering with each other finds a solution to the problem at hand.

One villager, a close friend of the village blacksmith Mr. Buddish, takes one of the three remaining keys and practically flies back into the village. Relieved to see the early risen Mr. Buddish already up and heating up his boilers and fires for the days work, he anxiously whispers his request. Mr. Buddish adamantly agrees, and within minutes another copy of the key is made in record time. Leaving with the promise of a invitation to a good hot dinner, and drink for the blacksmith and his wife that night for his silence, the villager returns with the new key together with the other village watchmen.

Mr. Mason, none the wiser.

The key, they all reason with each other, must be lost somewhere near the cabin or stable, probably in the long grass or dirt. They do a customary search before reassuring themselves that there is no worry about someone using the lost key. Because who, on all that is holy and wise in this village, who would want to go anywhere near the Wendigo creature?

***

Well, Will does of course.

After breaking his morning fast with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford. He hides the key in his cot, in a gap in the wood frame. Will does not want to risk losing it sometime during the day. It would be just his luck that he drops it, or it falls out of his breeches in an inopportune moment.

Inside, his emotions are a turmoil of eager excitement and impatient anxiety. He wishes time to go faster so it can already be nighttime, and Will can finally see the Wendigo. He has everything he needs now, he is sure of it. The dogs catch on to his excitement when he goes to see them. Behaving rowdy and cheekily, before Mr. Hobbs shoos Will away and tells him to get whatever he needs to do so pressing out of his system first before coming back. Easier said than done of course, as Will must wait for night. Abigail is the only one who regards him with suspicion still instead of glee that Will is in such a excited mood. In her eyes, Will is never an excitable person without good reason.

“Are you going to tell me what has you all riled up?” She asks bluntly, hands on hips, chin up. A stance very familiarly associated with Abigail when she confronts.

For the first time since the morning Will falters. He wants to tell Abigail what he is up to, what he has planned. But his gut tells her that she already has an inkling, and doesn't approve.

Will understands that this almost obsession with the Wendigo will not be understood by any in the village, even Abigail. Abigail watches the pained conflict in her friends eyes. Then Will's eyes flicker, and all the conflict is gone, replaced with determination and resolve. He meets her eye to eye.

“I have to do this Abie.”

Abigail deflates a little at Will's declaration.

“Please don't get yourself killed.” she says.

Will looks back down at the earth between his shoes, then back up at her. His face goes unusually soft, devoid of Will's trademark furrowing brows. His eyes seeing through her this time, to a place she fears she can never go.

“He won't hurt me.” he states softly.

Abigail sucks in a breath.

So it is as she fears, Will is going to try and see the Wendigo creature.

A tide of worry flows through her, but one look at Will's face tells her that for better or for worse, Will is determined to do this. She can only nod once at him in silence. Will smiles a strained smile at her, then turns and walks away, patting his thigh once for Winston to follow. Abigail ponders, her mind debating whether to run and tell her father or the Crawford's. But if she does, she knows Will will never forgive her. Plus no doubt the creature is chained and locked away so no one can approach it easily even if they were in the cabin. Her mind goes through all sorts of dreadful scenarios, and even worse, more happier scenarios where Will becomes friends with the creature. Ever since that night of its capture, she has felt her friend move bit by bit away from everything, away from her. The point that makes it worse is that it doesn't seem sudden, nor out of ordinary, like Will has always been that way deep down.

It scares her. It's too much for a child to comprehend.

All Abigail knows, as she watches Will walk away, is that she is sad.

Change, can be very sad.

***

Despite having all the means, Will waits another five days before his time comes. The night on the morning he gets the key, he sneaks over to the cabin and almost gets caught again by Randall.

Will grumbles and curses all the way home.

The next night, Will makes it all the way to the cabin, but is unable to sneak inside, as the villagers on duty for watch this night are two of the more attentive ones. One stands guard at the door almost the entire time.

Will is unable to sneak in, nor does he want to risk it.

….Well, it takes Will some inner dialogue to convince himself the risk is not worth it.

The next night....Randall again.

The fourth night, Will makes it to the door. But a random choice of pacing by a villager has him hurrying back to hide. That, and Will takes too long in trying to quietly use the key on the big padlock.

The fifth night, the time comes.

Everything is perfect.

The guards are again, Boyle and Peter. The night is rustling slightly from the wind, which masks any noise Will may make by accident. Will is patient. He picks his moment perfectly. He dashes silently to the door when Boyle and Peter move out of sight, whips out the key, and only with a slight scraping of metal on metal.... after the previous night, Will oiled the key a little... he slowly closes the padlock again, just enough to make it seem as if it hasn't been unlocked at all, and sweeps inside in a flurry of quiet cloth, moving wood, and a thumping beating heart.

***

Pain.

Pain, sorrow, rage, hunger.

That is all the Wendigo can feel.

Over and over and over again since his capture. Inside the irritating bars of searing hardness.

He is weak, so weak. Weak from hunger and the torment the slimy human being inflicts on him almost every day. The Wendigo can tell when night comes, when his time of being comes, a time he now can't be free to roam and hunt as he should, as is his right.

Instead he is here. Trapped.

At least the night gives him rest, recuperation, time to heal as much as he can from the mornings pain. But his healing is starting to get sluggish. The beings do not feed him well. They starve him. Often, force feed him rotting plants and grains that give him no nutrition. Or faeces. The Wendigo brought beyond the edge of indignity, and that is what pains him the most. He is a majestic creature, and this torture is almost bringing him to his knees.

The morning comes and the fur less animals arrive.

Always five, and always with the slimy one.

The Wendigo can sense the slimy one, his aura, his slick, slimy, brown ooze of self that pollutes him with every breath forced to make in its presence. The cage holds him, the

strange ropes hold him. Burn his skin from their shiny sheen and unfeeling smoothness. Horrible little scratching on it holds extra pain. The beings come with weapons and other things that hurt. The strange bindings tie him down as the slimy one uses things on his body. They envelope him in pain..... so much pain. They use fire and sometimes burning things not quite on flame, bright red hot and scarring like embers made solid as ice. The slimy one marks him, somewhere on his back is a mark that will never leave him. The Wendigo feels sham. The mark is purposeful, and not like the other marks that mar his obsidian body. They break his bones again and again. They break off part of one of his glamorous antlers. Some things they use on him is small, some sharp, some large, some flexible and whips at him with many searing flickering tongues, some are done at a distance, some are close, but all fill him with pain.

They make him weak.

Then they show him her.

Her.

His precious little one.

Her broken body.

She was his life, his meaning for breathing. She was the light to his darkness, so sweet and innocent as one newly born.

And they butcher her.

Her body broken and blooded, her eyes, once so full of life, blank and empty.

The Wendigo cannot even attack them in his weak state. He can only roar out his rage. Watches helplessly for the first time in his life as they defile her body, using many of the same things they use on him. Her body sears, scars, tries to bleed but there is nothing alive left. They pour rank liquid over her, stink, and faeces. Crack the once beautiful white horns from her head and hang them up on the wood wall. Then they cut her into pieces in front of him. The Wendigo cannot even cry, such is the shock and pain that fills him seeing such wrong acts done against something so pure. The slimy one is speaking, and although he cannot understand him he knows of a venom tongue when it hisses.

“Like to eat us hmmmm?....like to attack us and defile us with your dark nature? Well no more! The holy light has shown me your punishment! I shall cut into you and see how deep the evil runs! You will be defiled in turn, and burnt deep into your soul, and you shall know true power!”

Mr. Mason's eyes are manic and wide, spittle flecks out of his mouth as he speaks, and his face is ruddy and flushed from his exuberance.

They force feed the Wendigo pieces of his defiled beloved sibling.

In the case of her death, if it was to happen, the Wendigo would naturally mourn her, then eat her, to keep part of her with him forever. But not like this.

Only two things give the Wendigo the will to not give up, to not pass on to the next life, and leave this living hell. One, is his absolute overwhelming desire to punish with fear and power those that have done him wrong. He will not even eat them, he will leave them for the scavengers to peck at, and take his power back from them, as it should be.

At night, he removes himself from his pained and broken body. Delves deep into his mind where the palace of his memories reside. Thoughts and memories from years and years of time lived. Recalling every slight, every wrong, every hurt, which will be dealt back a thousand fold. He recalls and analyses, he thinks and ponders, sees and senses, gathers information needed for when the time comes. He goes over, even though it pains him, the night of his capture and the death of his little one.

But...one thing confuses him. One small fact of that night puzzles him and gives him pause. His other reason.

The presence of the youngling.

The small tiny one of the strange animals that was there that night.

The Wendigo knows of the small offspring of the beings before of course. Pink, noisy things of no threat. But this one.....this one is different. His aura a mirage of shifting colours and sharp glass bits reflecting back everything around. Inside eyes coloured like the grotto waters, a small dark abyss sleeps. The Wendigo never before remembers sensing such a being, and he did not expect to see and sense such amid the mist of the other insignificant creatures.

But he does remember seeing this particular strange youngling before. The youngling would sit near the big flat tree surrounding the village, and rest near the treeline of the wood. At first, the Wendigo wanted to roar its voice loud, and scare the youngling away. But something in him stopped him from doing so. Even then, from a distance, he can sense that the youngling for some reason belonged where he was. Melding into the night around him, and the Wendigo felt sadness for some reason. This puzzles him. Normally he can sense fear, arrogance, the stench of anger and prey animal from these beings. He soon catches his sibling about to approach the youngling and fear grips him. He roars aloud and scolds his sibling about the dangers of being seen by certain creatures when she is still so little. Despite his curiosity, he is content to dismiss the youngling and keep himself and his sibling away for safety. Then the gifts arrive. At first the Wendigo is cautious and angry, thinking that this is another feeble trick of the beings. But the gifts seem genuine not harmful, and bring with it such delight to his sibling. He never tells her, but he does not think the youngling means harm.

Then that horrific night and his beloved little ones screams.

Now, he sits trapped and conflicted. For if it weren't for the youngling leaving gifts, his sibling would still be alive. Yet it didn't escape his notice that during the time of attack, the youngling aided them. Calling off the slave animals and fighting with his brethren. The

Wendigo gloriously kills the rank beings for their sins of death to his sibling. The youngling he turns to, and for reasons unknown, quiets his rage. Normally he is unstoppable while in one of his rages, but the look they share. It is as if he were looking at another Wendigo.

The youngling keens his interest. If possible, the Wendigo would very much like to see the strange youngling again.

Again... happening soon enough.

***

It is dark inside the cabin. The only light coming from a single oil lamp still lit.

It is a plain wooden cabin, not unlike the hutch Will once lived in with Mr. Graham. It is mostly one whole room with another small closed door room at the back. The windows are boarded up with wooden planks, plunging the room in almost complete darkness, if not for the oil lamp casting dancing deadly shadows around the room. The sides are lined with benches and hooks, all burdened with blooded cloths and sharp strange instruments of silver. Large hooks hang from the ceiling, some coated in congealed drying blood, some gleaming white. High up on one of the walls, a piece of obsidian bone hangs, sucking in the darkness around it. The entire place stinks of blood, wet meat, metal, and rotten fruit. There are clear splotches and discoloured rust red stains on the wooden floors.

Cleaning can only work so much.

But Will observes all this much later than you would think. He only has eyes for a large structure almost directly in the centre of the room. A silver cage, gleaming like glass from the minimal light. Will can only just make out the little symbolic scrawls that have been written on the bars and in paint on the floor around the cage. But even then, Will only notices this fact in passing. All of his energy, all of his focus, is on what is inside the cage. Crouching, black, deadly, and no less magnificent than the first time Will saw him outside The Wall all those months ago.

The Wendigo.

Will can barely breath, his eyes wide open. Whether in attempt to gather as much visual stimuli as possible in the darkly lit room, or from sheer wonder and shock that this moment is finally here, is anyone's guess.

Probably a bit of both.

Finally, he can see the Wendigo again, meet him again. It is no fireworks moment, there is no sudden epiphany, nor enlightenment that occurs inside Will. There is simply the Wendigo, right in front of him. Will can feel the world dull around him until it is only that, and he can only just resist the sudden urge to fling himself at the bars and reach out.

Only natural self preservation in front of a predator keeps him put.

The single light from the oil lamp shines off the silver cage, and in Will's mind each shine of gold that reflects swipes away the cage and everything else until there is only him and the Wendigo. Will also feels remarkable relief that the Wendigo is alive, and not cut into pieces much like he dreads he would have come upon opening the cabin door. His throat clicks as he swallows hard and releases a shaky breath.

“Wendigo....” he whispers softly.

This gets a reaction.

Will startles as the Wendigo slowly lifts to a rising crouch, the cage not quite big enough to properly accommodate the monster inside. The Wendigo opens its mouth showing its sharp teeth and releases a sudden low loud screech of noise. Will winces, and cannot help but take a step back in sudden fear. Even in a cage, the Wendigo is a formidable creature.

Alarmed murmurs and shocked calls ring outside, and Will spins his head back to the door in fear. Should Boyle or Peter investigate, there is no place to hide. Will will most definitely be caught if they discover the padlock unlocked, and open the door. He turns with imploring eyes back to the Wendigo, and his hands reach out in front of him either in an attempt to sooth, or a futile attempt to push the dreadful noise back to where it came from.

“Please.” Will hisses, softly imploring, all fear forgotten in the moment. “Please don't...please.. they'll catch me, and then....” Will stops. He knows exactly what might happen if he is caught. But what makes panic seize in his chest is not the catching precisely, but the consequence.

He will never be able to see the Wendigo again. When he has not even...well, Will doesn't even know. All he knows is that he is supposed to be here, and that is good enough.

Will's head dashes side to side as he continues to plead, his eyes wide in panicked agony, glancing from the Wendigo who's head is lowered and still screeching, to the door where he can hear Peter and Boyle in agitated argument.

Finally, mercifully, the Wendigo stops its screech, keeping its head low, but seemingly considering the begging boy in front of him. Will releases a breath which catches half way out in exhale as he hears again the men's voices closer to the door. Will's arms are still outstretched, as if any movement right now whatsoever might jinx him. His eyes squeeze shut in pleading to whatever supernatural being of fate might be, that they bless him this situation of escaping being caught.

Precious seconds go by. Outside Peter and Boyle still argue in hushed tones. Peter wants to open the door and check on the Wendigo.

“In..in...in.. c-cc-case-e...some-e...some-e-thingsssss...h-h-hapened.”

Boyle is afraid, he does not want to go anywhere near the creature. But he will never show it. So he snorts in arrogant false bravado.

“Look here now. Mr. Mason also said that unless there is a dire emergency no one is to go in there! Or have you forgotten already you dumb-shit?”

Peter shakes his head vehemently. “I-I-I've n-not...f-f-fforgotten.”

“Then don't worry about it. Hear. He's already stopped. Probably bashing the bars like the rabid creature it is.”

Boyle, in another show to prove his lack of fear, kicks at the door and makes the padlock jangle.

Will's insides seize even more if that is at all possible. His whole body rigid in hope that the padlock won't fall or open, to show that it is indeed unlocked. His hands not moving from out in front of him, pleading as well, that the Wendigo will not make another noise at the kick. Will has not given prayer as much in his whole life, than he has in the last five minutes.

Thankfully, his hoping pays off, and the padlock holds. He listens to more grumbling outside, then the shuffling away of the two men.

Will's breath whooshes out in as silent a sigh as can be. Relief makes him shaky from the aftershocks of adrenaline.

He looks back to the cage, lowering his hands and arms gently as non threatening as he can perceive. The Wendigo is looking at him, unmoved and still as ever in his crouch. With the threat of discovery gone for now, Will can bask in the site of the Wendigo properly.

The facial features of the Wendigo are the same as that of any human man. An older male with sharp bone structure and high cheekbones. Strong nose, and thin wide lips under eyes turned slightly downwards at the edges, giving the Wendigo an almost sleepy look. Face placid, bald head, and bare eyebrows, the entire skin of the Wendigo is obsidian black. It's eyes, Will remembers in their previous short encounter as being blood red, shows now a milky muddy grey.

Winter eyes. With no iris or colour, it's even harder to discern what the Wendigo may be thinking.

Will finds this both disconcerting and intriguing, Will can normally tell in other people. Will glances down, and as best as he can in the minimal light, tries to see the Wendigo in his whole. The first thing Will notices is that the Wendigo is just as large in his memory as he is right now. Tall, broad, big boned, and well over 6 feet. Will figures he would only come up to the Wendigo's stomach if they stood side by side. A pang of sympathy follows this thought, as he can see the Wendigo is squished up in the cage with little moving room. Will continues in his perusal. The Wendigo isn't big in muscles, though those are clearly shown in strength, the Wendigo meant for formidable speed and deadly accuracy. His body is bony, his stomach caving in dramatically revealing every part of his ribcage ad hipbones. It adds to the otherworldly look of the Wendigo, a creature of eternal hunger. Majestic antlers join the abnormally long fingers, tipped with sharp claws. Will notices with a strange awe that he has six fingers on each hand instead of a normal humans five. His legs are hard to notice in the dark and crouched position, but Will spots strong legs slightly differing, slightly like that of a

dog on his hind legs. Will surmises it might make the Wendigo run faster, if there is any an explanation for it. Long clawed feet easily hold the weight of the Wendigo firm.

Will would like to say that his stare and assessment ended there. But it did not, and as a boy budding on the cusp of manhood, he could not help but look for signs of the Wendigo's sex between his legs.

….Yep....definitely male....

Blushing at the indelicacy of it, and the shocking daring nature of his actions, Will ducks his head to the ground, his cheeks aflame. After what seems to be an indeterminate length of time, at which point Will manages to compose himself.

The boy lifts his head back to the Wendigo and his eyes widen again. The Wendigo is comfortably squatting by the front bars, head up, staring right at Will. His face stoic and expressionless as ever but Will cannot shake the strange feeling he gets, that the Wendigo is talking. Not clearly out loud, nor inside his head, but Will can hear him all the same. As clear as if the Wendigo is screaming it in his ear.

Hmmmm....curious...strange little one...different ...what is it that you are?...why did you come?

Will's mouth opens and truths are drawn from him as if pulled from his mouth with string.

“You know I'm....I'm not sure why I'm here. I just... I needed to see you. I had to see you.” Will and the Wendigo stare at each other.

Will cannot move, and the Wendigo does not. The stare is not uncomfortable exactly. In a way, both boy and creature take comfort from the presence of the other. The Wendigo lifts its head as far as the cage will allow and takes in the youngling before it, drinking in Will's scent and sight. Will in turn, can't tear his gaze away from the Wendigo. He does not feel any judgement, nothing that indicates that the Wendigo wants him to go. Will is so used to being the outcast, even with his friends. People naturally being wary, him not belonging to the village design.

There is nothing of that here.

Just dark shadows, and two figures together in a wooden room. Their breath harsh and heard clear by both.

In...and out.....in...and out.....

Will is not sure how long he stands with the Wendigo, until harsh reality intrudes on them both. Hearing the grumbling and stamping of the feet of Boyle and Peter. Will knows the change of village guard is happening. If he has any chance of not being caught and escaping before notice, he must leave now. He does not notice his head turning towards the door until he turns his head again to look back at the Wendigo. The creature too looking at the door, and turning back to stare impassively at Will. A simple movement made close to sync by both. Will doesn't want to leave, he is not sure when he will be able to visit again.

But visit again he must.

“I have to go.” Will says in a sad voice. He feels a wave of sadness from the Wendigo and is not sure if it is imagined or real.

“I'll come see you again.” Will immediately rushes to say. “When I can. But I will.”

Will hesitates, his body vibrating with unwillingness to move from his spot in front of the cage. A sense of lost time staring at the Wendigo alarms him more as he realises that his movement subconsciously much closer to the cage than when he first entered. He looks into the Wendigo's completely milky eyes and whispers

“Bye.”

Before turning around and silently walking to the door in a crouch. He opens the door silently in a peek and the sees that the coast is clear. With one last backward glance at the Wendigo, he slips through the door, locks it, then sneaks away from the Verger property.

I hope you come back.

***

Will's walk back home feels distorted. His mind, very much like on the night he first saw the little white creature. Everything around him in the budding dawn is stark and harsh.

But so very beautiful.

Part of him cannot believe what has just happened. He saw the Wendigo again, and it was both everything and nothing like he expected. It was not the same strange connection that happened when they first met.

It is....more.

The draw between them so strong. They have already been hooked, now the reeling in. Will goes home in a type of trance.

Frustrated, though he is not entirely sure why. He got what he wanted. He saw the Wendigo again. Now he wants more. Will thinks about it a little. He supposes it's not unlike trying to get the friendship of a dog. Wanting the dog to trust you, and be your friend. Will wants to do things for the Wendigo, have the Wendigo get to know him, because he feels that the Wendigo is the only being that can. He wants to know all about the Wendigo. This is so much more than getting one of his dogs to love him.

….Wait...love?...when did THAT get into play?

Will stops still and his mind goes into overdrive, almost hyperventilating.

What does a child know of love? Especially with a creature such as the Wendigo? What can Will possibly do for the Wendigo?

Why is Will even thinking of this?!?

He gives his whole body a shake as if to remove all the mind chaos to fall to the ground like loose fur. He continues his walk home, shoving his thoughts to the back of his head. He cannot look at them right now. All he knows is that he wants the Wendigo as a friend, and he will go and visit him whenever he can. If only to add some diversion to the torture that Mr. Mason inflicts.

Will is not blind.

He saw the rips in the Wendigo's body. The burns, the injuries, slightly hard to see in the dark and the black of the Wendigo's skin, but he saw them. Sadness chokes his throat when his mind pictures just how such injuries came about. He remembers the instruments lining the benches and walls. Will most likely will have a nightmare tonight. He still gets them. Not as often as at the start but they still happen. His mind powerless to protect himself from himself in his sleep.

Will picks up Winston from where the dog waits and takes a moment to rub behind his ears and croon to him for being such a loyal dog. Winston's tail wags happily, but he sniffs at Will and snorts, whining.

“Yeah. That place did not smell good.” Will makes a face.

Winston gives a soft huff and follows his master.

Will ponders, as he continues to walk. He is sure that the Wendigo wants him to come back too. He is sure of it. Will gives up trying to shove his thoughts to the back of his head and lets them flow through him. His meeting the Wendigo again wasn't like the first time, but what meeting ever is? He is sure he can almost feel what the Wendigo is saying, which is absurd and could simply be the result of an over active imagination. But Will is sure it is not. The Wendigo did stop screeching when Will pleaded. It did not seem hostile to him either. Will is good as deciphering the small signs of communication through his time with the dogs, and holding a tiny gift of it with people. The impressions Will got from the Wendigo cannot be completely imagined. Then again, there is only one way to find out.

Will reaches home and enters to the usual sight of Mr. Crawford at the table with a book, and Mrs. Crawford at the stove. She turns around at the sound of them.

“Winston wake up early again?”

“Yes.”

Will sits down with a sigh and rests his head onto his folded hands on the table. He looks at Mr. Crawford opposite him, who raises an eyebrow at Will with a soft grunt before continuing his book. He definitely suspects that Will has been having night time excursions, but pays it no heed. Boys will be boys. Besides, Will finally seems to have settled into his life

and put the incident of the Wendigo behind him. Mr. Crawford will let him have his night explorations. Will is a wild child at heart, Mr. Crawford tells himself, smiling over at the boy across from him fondly.

Will goes through the motions of the morning. It is only during the middle of class at school that his feelings suddenly get the better of him. His face breaking out into the biggest grin he has ever made, staring off into the distance, remembering every second he spent with the Wendigo.

“Care to share your happy nature with us today Will?” Miss. Alana stops by to ask the smiling boy at his desk. Never has she seen Will behave as such before. The boy just shrugs in response, the smile never leaving his face. Miss. Alana narrows her eyes at Will, sensing something is up, but accepts that she will never be told, continuing with her lesson.

The smile does not leave Will's face all day.

***

Despite Will's resolution to go and see the Wendigo again that very night. His hopes are dashed by reality, or more specifically... Randall. Will feels irritation like angry ants crawl all over his body. It takes all the will he can muster to not go over to where he sees Randall clearly prowling, and tackle the other boy head on.

In the end, it takes a few days before circumstances allow Will another visit. During that time, Will feels as nervous as...well....anything. He can very easily drive himself insane with his thoughts and feelings concerning the Wendigo. Will the visit be like the last? Will it be different?

….Did the Wendigo miss him?

Nevertheless, Will does as before and slips into the cabin unseen.

Then stops on a gasp.

Will did wonder why he did not hear the Wendigo roar out this afternoon. The answer is a thick silver link around the Wendigo's throat. Most likely hindering any noise it may make. It prevents the Wendigo from moving around at all lest it touch the silver which Will is guessing it is allergic to. Will gets the impression that the new collar may be because of the noise the Wendigo made the night before when Will first entered the cabin. The Wendigo raises its head. Its whole body is vibrating, and it alarms Will. The entire cabin reeks of blood and the icy cold of winter. Will was probably too anxious over meeting the Wendigo last time, that he has failed to notice just how cold it is in the cabin.

I guess Miss. Alana was right, Will thinks. The Wendigo symbolises the cold, creating a cold start of the summer time in the village. It would make sense that it would increase the cold in

the small cabin. Will steps forward a little almost at arms reach from the silver bars. The Wendigo lifts its head and if it were possible, Will almost feels the lightening of its face, though physically, no face could be more impassive. The vibrating grows stronger.

You came back

“Yes.” Will replies, as if the Wendigo actually spoke. “I mean, it's me again. I-I hope you don't mind.”

Will is not even really sure if he can understand the Wendigo, but deep inside he knows it to be true. The voice in his head is different to his own inner dialogue, deeper, smoother, perhaps even slightly cultured and articulate. Will cannot fathom why he has come up with this particular voice. He even thinks that the Wendigo can understand him. Though there is no reason or writing Will has read to suggest that the Wendigo can understand the spoken word. There are many animals that have a language all of their own. Dogs bark and howl, birds chirp their song. Is the Wendigo trying to speak to Will in such a language? Is that why Will can read it? His abnormal perception and imagination so unlike others, that perhaps he can understand a language no many else can. Will can only go with the deep feeling inside of him. He does not notice that he has let his thoughts get away from him again and he is looking at the floor at his feet with a disgruntled expression. He does not know exactly why he wants to come back or why he is here, just that he has to be.

A small slight low sound of pain spurs Will to lift his head. The Wendigo has shifted forward slightly towards the bars and Will, causing the chains and collar to connect with the Wendigo's skin. Will can smell a slight burning smell, but he cannot break his eyes away from the pupil less eyes of the Wendigo. They burn with inner fire in a icy white light, and Will leans forward, drawn, stepping closer and putting out his hand to grip the bar. Will pulls his hand away immediately, opening his palm up and looking at it for signs of injury. None are seen, his hand darkly shadowed by the lack of light, but unhurt.

Will places his hand back hesitantly to grip the bar tight. His breathing is laboured and adrenaline fills his veins, his heart thumping wildly. Because of the collar the Wendigo probably cannot reach him, but the thrill of it, the danger, makes Will tremble. His eyes meet the Wendigo once more to find that the Wendigo has tilted his head slightly, face still open.

I am glad you are here...though I know not why.

Will cannot help the small smile he makes. He is about to tell the Wendigo that he too is glad to be here, his confusion of emotions on being here, and the strange urge that drives him, but he stops himself at the last minute and decides to take a page out of the Wendigo's book. Hand gripping the bar tight, knuckles turning white, Will looks deep into the Wendigo's eyes and lets loose his feelings to show on his face.

Not something he is used to doing.

His eyebrows furrow together and he knows his small smile has turned pained, but he leaves nothing not exposed. A small humming rumble gives sound from the Wendigo, seeing Will, understanding, not being afraid, but accepting this strange younglings feelings.

The Wendigo shifts forward, the pain of the silver collar forgotten or rather dismissed quickly. For one quick moment, they are connected. The boy and the Wendigo. The dark of the cabin and dancing shadows from the lamp light once again stripping back each insignificant form until they are in a world of their own. It matters not the reason, nor the strangeness of it, the oddness. There is this being, and that being, and this is all they need to be.

I see you.

Will only allows the feeling for one more moment before reality sinks in, and fear fills him from his dark feelings exposed too long. He retreats into himself and takes his hand away. He doesn't look at the Wendigo and shakes his head, glaring at the floor beneath him. This is all too much for Will, and in childlike confusion, he rejects it for a moment.

“I have to go.” He states, before turning away quickly and moving towards the door, peeking out and slipping out.

Goodbye Little One.

All the way back home he can feel the sinking sadness and loneliness of the Wendigo behind him, the eyes that follow him out of the cabin and burn deep holes into his back no matter how far away Will walks. He knows he has a lot to think about. The reality of his visits to the Wendigo banging him down to earth with a thud, shattering his emerging feelings. Suddenly Will can't breath enough, wheezing and panting, his head dizzy and throbbing. He is suffering a panic attack. Will sinks into the dirt ground on the Crawford's front yard and tries to stifle the clenching tightness in his chest. Will grabs at his shirt clothing as if to rip it from his body and ease the pain. Let loose the churning feelings inside. Winston whines and licks at his face. Will takes a shaky breath and reaches out to grab Winston and pull him into a hug.

Will has no idea what he is doing. His past filled with the goal of visiting the Wendigo, now achieved, not once but twice, he has no idea where to go from here. His actions have no logic.

Will continues through the next few days in a haze. His friends all try to cheer him up but nothing is getting through. Mr. Crawford is shocked when Will declines a fishing trip, and Mrs. Crawford puts the kitchen through overdrive cooking a sweet pie for Will. Even Mam Bev, softens her tone, having not the heart to scold the already clearly sorrowed boy. Will is depressed, anxious, distracted, and strangely angry. His mind is filled with the face of the Wendigo right in front of him, the shadows in the cabin dancing along the features of a monster. But the Wendigo is not a monster to Will...Will is...not sure what the Wendigo is to him.

In his worst times, Will feels horrible guilt.

The Wendigo is there because of him. Because of Will's visits to the wood and gifts left to the white Wendigo.

How long did it take for Will to be caught? How long will it take until Will is caught again this time, should he continue to visit the Wendigo? Does the Wendigo blame him for the

white Wendigo's murder? Is this what the Wendigo wants? To lure him in and kill him for revenge? Will wouldn't blame the Wendigo. But deep in his heart he knows this is not true, there is something more between them then revenge or hurt. Everything is tearing up his insides until Will can barely breath. It does not help that he can hear the painful roars of the Wendigo almost every evening, as Mr. Verger continues in his 'tests'. All the villagers have accepted the noise, as horrible as it is. But Will does not forget. One evening, the roars are louder than usual and do not stop for a while.

“Will? Are you alright? You're crying.” Molly's soft voice says to him.

Her hand reaches up to his cheek in a soft brush, and there on her fingers is salt water. Will startles to see it, but now that he has he can feel the burn in his eyes and wetness on his cheeks. He bravely pulls himself together and does his best to reassure Molly, but his clear reaction to the Wendigo's roars have shaken him. His friends with sad faces reason it to Will's known dislike to hear animals in pain, perhaps even the most horrible of creatures.

In the end, Will decides to visit the Wendigo one last time. To put it all on the table and either end it... or bring it all to the surface.

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Will keeps awake that night and as if he could do it now in his sleep anyway, sneaks past the villagers guarding the cabin, and into the Wendigo's presence.

To his disturbing delight, the Wendigo perks up slightly at the sight of him, though the Wendigo's face is expressionless as always.

But Will can feel the joy.

To Will's relief the silver collar is no longer around its neck, but cuffed to the Wendigo's wrists and ankles. As if like a moth to the flame, Will moves right up to the cage and grips the bars tight. He can no longer smell burning flesh. The Wendigo shifts forward in a crouch and goes face to face with Will. Will can sense no danger, no, the Wendigo is not showing him any aggression at all.

It confuses Will more, but he does not run from it this time.

“I wasn't going to come back.” Will speaks trembling “But I had to. I had to tell you everything. I'm not even sure if you can understand me. I hope you can.” Will looks up and his eye's meet the Wendigo's.

I want to hear you

“Well,” Will speaks. “My name is Will Graham. You killed my father, Mr. Grant Graham. I...I was there when you were taken. I kept leaving gifts for your other, Wendigo. The white Wendigo. It's my fault... I tried to get there...I kept leaving them....it's my fault.”

Will realises tears are again falling from his eyes, his head bent low, and he hears a rumbling coming from the Wendigo.

Shaken by something he senses in the air, Will snivels in his tears and steps back, alarmed for a moment when he looks up and sees that one of the Wendigo's hands has reached up and Will suspects had been about to touch him. Will takes one step back from the cage and sits down on the wooden floor. If Will wanted, he knows that one subtle shift forward will allow the Wendigo to reach him, but he doesn't close in that gap.

Not again, not right now. Another low rumble has Will lifting his fallen head again to meet the Wendigo eye to eye.

Please speak to me...why are you sad? Why are you here?

“I-I know you feel it too...this....feeling between us.” Will says.

Yes.

“I don't know what it is...but, i've never been one to run away.”

Nor I.

Will gives a soft soundless laugh.

“Yes. I thought that of you too.”

For the first time in days, a small smile crosses Will's face. Sitting here now, in front of the Wendigo, feels as natural as breathing. As if all the raging waves of Will's emotions calm in the presence of the Wendigo, like a paddle in a boat out at sea, keeping him focused on what is right in front of him.

Another rumble spurs Will to continue.

“I heard you roar today.” Will looks over at the sides of the cabin where the slightly bloodied instruments hang. In his peripheral vision, he sees the Wendigo glance over at them too.

“He keeps hurting you, I see the wounds on you, the burns. I hate that he is hurting you.” Will's voice goes softly fierce. “It's not right!” Will reminds himself to keep his voice low from the guards but his feelings show all the same.

The Wendigo looks at him with amusement, and sadness. He eyes the instruments, and makes a low purring sound that starts low and lifts slightly in tone.

Do not trouble yourself, such a pig will not be able to break me with any of these things.

Will gives another soft huff at the Wendigo's response. But just as suddenly the guilt overrides him again, and he can feel the telltale sign of another emotional breakdown as his chest tightens and breath comes in short, tears once again flooding his eyes. In his mind, that terrible night comes to the fore, and he relives it all again.

“I'm so sorry,” Will quietly sobs, “About everything...about her...about you....I don't even care that you killed my father, he was a drunken.... but should I care? I want to come see you every night. Is this wrong? I'm human, you're a Wendigo. He hurts you...Mr. Mason. And I know its my fault. I'd break you out if I could but I can't....I'm just a child...but it hurts so much and I don't feel like a child. All the other villagers, I don't belong there....I-I...can you help me?”

It is as if every hurt, every uncertainty, every bit of repressed feeling is now pouring out of Will, leaving only childhood scars behind. He cannot even lift his head from the weight again. He can only, finally, pour his heart out to the one being in the world he has ever felt connected to. He feels stuffy and full of wool.

A small pain sound lifts Will's head again. The Wendigo has reached out his arm through the cage bars in an attempt to reach Will, with one outstretched clawed hand. But even with the Wendigo's long fingers Will is just out of reach. His arm brushes the silver bar and with a small hiss, he retreats back into the cage. A mournful sound enters Will's ears.

Do not cry. I am here with you youngling.

“I know you are.” Will whispers.

Will wants to approach the bars and allow the Wendigo to touch him. But even as he shifts forward slightly, the Wendigo shifting forward in response, Will catches himself and settles back where he is sitting.

A feeling of disappointment fills Will but he pushes it aside. He is not quite ready yet, despite his outburst.

“I feel better now.” Will says with a small smile. “I feel relieved. I haven't been able to let go like that before with anyone, just you.”

The sound the Wendigo makes seems to be that of a placated being, and Will's smile grows a little bigger.

Stamping and grumbles voices from outside breaks through the newly formed reverie.

The village guards are changing, it must be dawn soon. Though Will cannot tell the time from inside the boarded cabin.

In a way he likes it though, the man made night time of him and the Wendigo's own little shadow world.

But it is typical that time is never a friend of a budding relationship.

Will, quietly as possible, scrambles to his feet.

“I have to go.”

He smiles at the Wendigo and answers the questioning rumble that comes to him.

“I'll be back as soon as I can this time. I promise.”

Will pushes back the urge once more to get closer to the bars, and instead slips away quietly.

Will's sudden good mood again puts Mr. and Mrs. Crawford on a relieved edge. Not wanting to ruin their son's happiness but some subconscious paternal feeling telling them something unusual is going on. His friends too, act a bit wary around him for a while. Clearly not understanding the strangeness that is Will Graham, and his mood swings. But Will feels only relief. He feels free, and happy, to know that there is one being in the world that is not wary of him, that will accept him completely. While Molly and Jimmy are overjoyed at their friends happy state. Abigail watches Will carefully. She cannot help the feeling that ever slowly, her friend is indeed drifting apart from the world around him.

Everyone notices that Will is often tired, as if he has not slept properly the whole night through.

Note here, that while Will visits the Wendigo night after night, his life outside of the Wendigo's cabin continues on. His mental state healing as his visits with the Wendigo cheer and free him on the inside. Their budding friendship and bond something that no one else can replace for either of them. Not the dead tragic ghost of the little white wendigo, and not any person Will will ever interact with in his lifetime.

Or maybe it is simply Will's view on life that changes slightly with his visits to the Wendigo.

Either way.

Will finally finds his place in the village.

Always a bright and unusual child, his skills are starting to show and are greedily grabbed up by the hunger of a village prospering.

With the Wendigo captured and clearly still caged in Mr. Mason's disgusting hands. The village hears and sees no more evidence of another Wendigo in Wolf Trap Wood. Leaving the village with only the well known threats and dangers they are already adapt in defending against.

Will trains with Mr. Hobbs and Abigail in visiting Wolf Trap Wood, outside the still built Wall. He learns all Mr. Hobbs can teach him about the wood and its flora, fauna and dangers. How to track, how to move, and how to hunt. He relishes these lessons, and his kinship with the dogs he is breeding and training. Will did expect Mr. Hobbs to take over the dogs in entirety, so his surprise in genuine then when Mr. Hobbs simply lets Will take over. Mr. Hobbs acting only as a figurehead in the role, a supervisor in name but only for reassuring the simple minded village folk that such responsibilities were not being truly left in the hands of a still child. The hunter indeed lets Will flourish wild on his own in the wood most days, spending the time instead teaching Abigail the duties of a hunter. The trio of course, do not let their activities be known to Mr. and Mrs. Crawford.

Peace comes in the Crawford's household and Will is reluctant to disturb it. He contently endures the affections of Mrs. Crawford as done so in the past. He finds her gentle care

soothing, and although his nightmares die off during the time he is visiting the Wendigo at night, the residual nightmares he does have are all to easily soothed away by a mothers touch.

Mr. Crawford also puts it upon himself to pick up the role of father figure to Will with determined vigour. Already guilty for not doing more for the boy when Mr. Graham was alive, Mr. Crawford is determined to show Will what a son can learn from a father. Will, already a bright minded child, absorbs whatever he can learn from Mr. Crawford with glee. Mr. Crawford teaches Will how to fight, how to defend himself from bigger enemies, how to speak to people so your intentions are known and obeyed. He teaches him the worth of money and travels with him to the towns and villages over to learn about new people.

Will, under the guise of assistant dog trainer, gains much in these visits, as his mask solidifies and he learns better how to interact and see everything around him while not giving away anything in return. His own brand of command. When Mr. Crawford sees how good Will is in fixing things and handling 'mans work', he appeals to Mr. Budge to teach him more accurate skills. Will, never in the whole time he works with Mr. Budge speaks more than five words to his son Tobias. A fact Will notices at the end of his studies with the carpenters, but accepts as Tobias often disturbingly looks at Will, as if asking himself what type of object would Will be and of what use.

Personally, amongst all of his teachings, Will loves the times he takes the dogs from Mr. Hobbs, and he and Mr. Crawford go fishing in the nearby lake. Neither two men talk much, which suits Will fine. He simply absorbs himself in the water and lets his defences go.

It is different from when Will visits the Wendigo, circumstances of his visits fraught with danger, and the interactions he has with the Wendigo too energy absorbing and powerfully mind melding to be considered relaxing. Not that Will doesn't enjoy his visits greatly. He only wishes the Wendigo need not have to be tortured and put in a cage. It sours his visits tremendously when he sees the Wendigo's wounds, and hears his pained roars in the evenings.

Oh, how Will wishes he could have met the Wendigo proper in Wolf Trap Wood instead. Ideas of helping the Wendigo escape float around in his head, but Will knows it is an almost impossible task to do on his own, and he knows none of his friends would help him. Maybe Abigail, but Will is not ready to risk it.

Instead, in a small selfish pleasure he hoards his visits and relationship with the Wendigo alone, and dreads the times when he hears the changing village guards which signal the end of his visit. Will often contemplates staying in the cabin longer, most likely on a Sunday, when he knows Mr. Mason won't attend to his dreadful acts until after all the worship sermons.

But tell us more of how the boy and the Wendigo come to bond I hear you say.....

Yes, yes, we will not dream to leave such a wonderful happening out.

For the first few nights, when Will visits the Wendigo he simply talks.

Speaking of his habits around the village, his hobbies of dog training and fishing, some antics of his friends...his viewpoints and what he gleams from watching the villagers, the secrets he knows but they do not know that he knows. He sits a little ways from the cage, only just out of arms reach of the Wendigo's long arms and grasp. Will faces the Wendigo crouching forward in the cage. The antlered head perking up with happiness whenever Will sneaks in. The fear Will has held within himself of the Wendigo being angry at him for his part in the death of the white Wendigo, soon dies away with every visit.

Indeed, the Wendigo finds himself not at all blaming Will or placing any angry thought for him in relation to that tragic night. Much too intrigued by words and mind of the youngling before him. Never has he met such a curious creature before, and he greedily takes in every spoken word breathed to him. A creature purely true to their own feelings and desires and not in its nature to feel conflicted in anything that it decides to do. It decides that it must know more of his new little one. Alas, it does alarm the Wendigo the level of obsession that grows with each visit. Yet there has no inclination whatsoever to discourage their interactions.

However, there is still one last obstacle to overcome, one last stretch before their bond becomes true.

They both know they have reached that point one night when Will sneaks into the cabin and stops where he usually sits.

The air is heavy, but not uncomfortable, it brims with electrified energy.

Will has felt his friendship with the Wendigo grow, and his trust blossom. He knows in his heart the Wendgo would never harm him. The shadows dance around from the one lit lamp as usual, only this time they seem to hush the air around the two beings, both staring at each other intently. The golden sheen stripping form filling instead the air in magical mist. Will still does not sit down. He can hear his every breath in the darkened cabin. His eyes widen as slowly the Wendigo tilts his head to the side in slight pondering.

Hmmmmmm...

Then the Wendigo rises up as far as he can go inside of the cage without touching its painful bars, before shifting its body to the back of the cage, and squatting into a more relaxed crouch. All the Wendigo's movements are sure and strong in power.

Will can feel himself trembling slightly as he walks forwards through thick air right up to the cage, a slight throbbing forming in the pit of his abdomen with each step. His eyes never separate from the white consuming gaze of the Wendigo.

Come closer....come closer...please...

Slowly, Will approaches the cage and grips both hands on the bars.

His knuckles turn white instantly.

He is wary, but feels no need to fear.
The Wendigo does not move from his spot at the back of the cage. His face disturbingly

impassive and still as stone as always, but Will can sense the nervousness coming from him. Slowly, Will uses to bars to turn himself around, gripping the bars from behind, and unsteadily, wobbling slightly, lowers himself down to sit, back leaning against the cage bars, legs straight out in front of him. It takes all the willpower Will has to not look around or turn his head towards the Wendigo, to keep his eyes on the cabin door. He takes a few unsteady breaths to steel himself, aware of every slight shift of resettling movement of the Wendigo behind him.

The entire cabin fills with anticipated charged energy. Will takes another big breath before opening his mouth.

“I had a good day today.” Will says, as if he is again simply sitting in front of the Wendigo, talking to him as usual.

He rests his head back in the gap between the two bars. His head just not quite falling through.

“School is good.” Will continues. “Miss. Alana is teaching us about the history of kings and such of the times of old. I'm not sure who is king of us now, or if there even is one. I've never been past two towns over. They seem to be great men these kings. They can hurt and send others to their death without blinking, or so the stories go. But they always get murdered themselves, usually by those they have trusted. In the morning, you go out and kill bandits in the kingdom...”

As Will continues on, he can feel the slight movement of the Wendigo behind him, the slight shift of the air, even more noticeable in the closed off cabin. Plus in his eye, he can see the dancing silhouette of a large formidable figure on the wall. Shifting forward ever so slowly, yes, but still moving forward to his goal, the boy in front of him so much closer now than he has ever been.

“...then after you break your morning fast, you go and poison your king.” Will finishes his sentence and tries to gain control over his thrumming pulse, his heart is beating so hard he is amazed it hasn't popped out of his chest, his mouth feels full of wool, and his voice is tremors. He speaks without real thought, just whatever is on his mind in the time. It is not so unusual to what he always does when he speaks with the Wendigo, so he is able to keep going.

He knows the Wendigo is listening to him.

“Men are murderers. All of us. I wonder what they think about when these men are about to declare sentence? The kings, that is. Do they think... shall I grant this man before me 'murder'?, or 'mercy'?”.

The Wendigo shifts closer. The soft sound of a great body moving across wooden floor, the shifting weight, small squeaking that can't be helped. The Wendigo is now within reach distance but makes no move to stretch out his hand.

Yet.

“From what I know of men, we don't have any mercy in us. We would rather choose to murder someone than grant them mercy. If we feel it is in our right. I suppose it is a choice, whether to make mercy instead of murder when the opportunity presents itself. To give it birth from the little parts a man has, that have gone beyond the basic animal mind to always attack, to always choose murder. But if it is a choice, then you could say that we choose to make murder too, as well as mercy.”

Will's voice has grown soft and contemplative. A stark contrast to his still thrumming pulse. The Wendigo, he can feel behind him very acutely. Neither move for a moment.

“So is it real? Murder and mercy? Or is it simply something that man has made for himself? True animals kill to survive, not to murder. I suppose it could, if it wants, but it won't. It'd be too wasteful.”

The Wendigo moves its head forward, almost, but carefully not touching the dangerous silver bars. Will can feel its breath now, almost cold, making the hair on his head move slightly and the hairs on his neck stand on end. He can finally smell the scent of the Wendigo, slightly rank from a body unwashed too long, but underneath, cold musk like the woods at night, and unmistakable metallic scent of blood.

“So I suppose you can say that man has all the makings to do murder, all the elements and mind needed. After all, didn't my father feel right it in his right to murder the innocent white Wendigo. I know you felt justified in murdering him in return.”

Will can see in his peripheral eye the shadow figure of the Wendigo on the wall. Everything in the cabin has gone silent except for Will's voice. A long shadowed clawed hand reaches out only an inch away from Will.

“Yeah, we have the makings for mercy too of course, but murder.... murder we know uncomfortably well.”

Then gently, very gently, Will feels the sensation of clawed nails moving through his hair. Behind him a small rumbling sound is made, its tone curious. Will closes his eyes and breath stops in his chest. Goosebumps breaks out on his skin and the only thing he can centre on is the feeling of the Wendigo stroking his head and hair gently through the bars with his sharp claws.
This goes on for a little while.

Will opens his eyes and slowly moves forward away from the touch.

He is not surprised when the Wendigo makes no move to stop him. Will moves only forward so much as to shift around and be face to face with the Wendigo. The silver bars the only thing separating them. The Wendigo's clawed hand still outstretched in front, thin claws between the bars which slowly safely pull back a bit.

The Wendigo's face is still....Will's face is still.

But the power and feeling between the two beings flows freely.

Will parts his lips slightly, and he cannot stop the breath from leaving him in an affectionate voiced whisper.

“Wendigo....”

The Wendigo is not alarmed this time. Cocking his head to the side slightly, he lets out a low groan. But this noise is soothing, affectionate in return, bordering on a questioning hum.

I have reached for you...will you reach for me?

Will smiles, and glancing between the Wendigo's obsidian eyes and the outstretched claw, he reaches his own hand slowly through the silver bars. Still slowly, his single middle fingertip touches the Wendigo, followed gently by the rest of his fingers and palm until he is flat hand to hand with the Wendigo. Will's breath is harsh and heavy but he doesn't want to give up the touch. His smile is wide, almost cracking his cheeks and he cannot stop a light laugh from escaping his suddenly scratchy voice.

The Wendigo finally makes a confirmed joyful rising and falling hum, and it is music to both their ears. Their fingers bend and they clutch at each others hand. It is a startling sight to see. The much bigger Wendigo's black hand engulfs the smaller pinker skin of Will's, fingers reaching Will's wrist. Yet to them both, nothing has looked so beautiful.

Will had expected the Wendigo's hand to feel ice cold, but it only feels soft and cool, while Will's is warm and slightly sweaty with nerves. Instead, the blood warmth from Will's hand seems to seep into the Wendigo's until both hands feel alive. Their pulses soon beating in joined rhythm. Will's slowing down to gain peace while the Wendigo's beat faster in living thrum.

The bond has been made.

There is no going back.

Enveloped in this new becoming without thought of time passing, only the sound of a cough and familiar yet unwanted set of noises as the village guards change shifts, disrupts like shattered glass the moment between them.

Will pulls a face, knowing their time is once again at an end, and he suspects even the Wendigo too is a bit frustrated, as it lets out a low annoying growl. Will cannot help but give another soft laugh at the sound, relief at feeling that the Wendigo too wishes for more of his company.

At Will's pure laugh the Wendigo feels soothed, and hums once again. Both reluctantly, they release each other and Will moves quickly to the cabin door. He will not risk being caught, not now. Looking back only once at the Wendigo who has not moved an inch from his position, Will whispers a conflicted “Goodbye,” before slipping out once more.

That day is the best that Will ever has.

The closest thing he can think of to a supposed heaven. The air seems sweeter, the sun brighter, nature more beautiful, the dogs more joyed, and Will spends the entire morning and afternoon, smiling wide, his heart for the first time light, his mind clear. Though the only thing he can focus on is the memory of his forbidden visit that morning, and the cool feel of the Wendigo's hand in his.

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As the months go by and Will starts to grow from a boy to a young man, so does his bond with the Wendigo. After the last physical hurdle between them is broken and the last bit of trust solidifies, we can only see and watch the interactions between the two blossom.

Friendship.

That may seem to many unusual to witness between the two beings very much different physically. Their true bond resides inside, and although it will face many hardships and obstacles to overcome, it is a friendship to indeed last all of time.

But apologies, we are drifting off track yet again, it is an easy to do.

Will is entering the cabin on one of these wonderful nights.

There is no hesitation now, nor reluctance, nor fear.

Will silently moves straight up to the cage where the Wendigo humms in happiness and shifts closer. Still wary of the nasty bars, and glad that this night is one of the many nights that Will is able to come to him.

Will tries to visit the Wendigo every night of course, but sometimes circumstance do not allow him to. The presence of active village guards, Randall, his life with the Crawford's, or sheer exhaustion from lack of sleep, being factors that rarely but from time to time stop Will from visiting. But as said, this is not one of those nights. Will grasps one of the bars tight while the other reaches out into the cage and joins hands once again with the Wendigo. The Wendigo's humming grows lighter, rising and falling like music.

“Hello.” Will greets his friend with a wide smile.

For a few seconds neither move, simply holding hands and delighted with each others company. Then Will's eyes shine mischievously, and he lets go of the Wendigo to sit down as close as possible to the bars and reach into his pocket.

“I've brought something for you.” Will murmurs happily, keeping his voice low. But the excitement is clear in his tone.

The Wendigo cocks his head to the side and makes a noise of inquiry. Will pulls out of his pocket a pan pipe, roughly made by himself from wood and time spent with Mr. Budge. He

holds it up for the Wendigo to see, one of many gifts and things he will bring and show to the Wendigo in the future months.

“It plays music.” Will informs the Wendigo.

Will pauses for a moment, aware that he must be quiet still to not alarm the guards outside, but wanting desperately to share this with the Wendigo. Head tilted and ear searching, he is satisfied that the guards outside are still walking and patrolling, the natural sounds of nature hiding them. So with another mischievous look at the Wendigo who is watching him with from what Will can discern is polite curiosity, he places the pipe between his lips and blows into the instrument softly to produce a soft low sound. Upon the sound the Wendigo rises up from his crouch near the bars.

Interesting....you make noise of the trees.

Will waits once more to make sure that he will not be heard, but his eyes have never left the Wendigo, wanting with delight to see the Wendigo's reaction.

He is not disappointed.

“Yes. It is called music, I like it very much too. It can sound a lot like the wood at night, with all the animals and trees alive.”

Next, with only slight hesitation, Will plays a few lighter higher pitched sounds, like whistling birds. The Wendigo's reaction is as he suspects, sinking a little in melancholy.

It sounds like her...my little one.

“Yes.” Will frowns in sadness, sharing in both their loss. “It sounds like the white Wendigo.”

Will shakes off the melancholy, and after pausing again to make sure the it is safe, starts to play a little aimless tune, closing his eyes in concentration to make sure he plays softly, giving thanks to Mr. Mason's sealing of all the windows to create a natural sound dampener effect in the cabin. He plays both high and low notes, rising and falling. When he opens his eyes he meets the Wendigo's who seems animated, slowly swaying from side to side to the sound of Wills pipe. Will's grin is wide and almost causes him to stop playing, but he closes his eyes once more and continues.

In truth, the Wendigo finds the sound distorted, and still prefers the natural music of the wood and nature. But he is impressed nonetheless with the copy sounds the youngling is creating from this thing, and happy in the delight he sees in the younglings aura from sharing this with him. It takes no effort at all to produce a similar sound, making his rough voice rise and fall with the younglings noises.

Will's eyes fling wide open at the sound of the Wendigo humming. But this hum is different. It is consistently rising and falling with Will's own sound. He plays the same few notes in tune so the Wendigo can follow easily, and feels the beat of his heart joining them in the cabin in song. The both of them close their eyes and sway together in song and dance.

Low, high, high, low, high, low, low, low.....

Low, high, high, low, high, low, low, low.....

Low, high, high, lo...

BANG! BANG! BANG!!

So lost are they to their own song, they are suddenly and abruptly shaken to a stop at the pounding of the cabin door by a rough hand, making it and the padlock rattle.

“Sherr'up in there!!!!” one of the village guard bellows, before grumbling about noisy beasts.

Adrenaline rushes through Will from the abrupt startle. He lowers the pipe and stays still to ensure he has not been found. Then with a glance at the Wendigo, covers his mouth and huffs in laughter from the humour of it. The Wendigo too purrs at Will, amused in the younglings response.

“I suppose I should stop now.” Will whispers still half laughing a bit uneasy.

He puts the pan pipe away rising up onto his knees, and reaches once more into the cage to grasp the Wendigo's clawed hand. It never ceases to amaze, the difference he can see between them when the two hold hands. But their bond is more than that.
“I guess we shouldn't do that again, or risk me being caught.” Will looks at their joined hands, then back into the Wendigo's eyes. “But I'm glad that I got to share this with you.” The Wendigo purrs in agreement.

I am glad too.

The next night he can visit, Will brings the Wendigo something a little less noisy. His book that Alana gave him on the Wendigo. He surmises that the Wendigo might be intelligent enough to recognise a book and the concept of reading. Or perhaps even just happily look at the pictures.

“This is a book.” Will informs the Wendigo, holding the book inside the cage with a little bit of weighted difficulty for the Wendigo to inspect.

He does so curiously, running sharp claws over its smooth front surface scratching it a little. He makes a questioning hum at Will, who pulls it back with a smile.

“It is what we do to share information, to get knowledge. I got most of what I know from you in here. Well, before I could visit you.” Will moves with care the only lamp and source of light in the cabin next to him, thankful again for the boarded up windows. He speaks to the Wendigo of the alphabet and the letters and words shown on the pages. He does not think the Wendigo can quite grasp the meaning of books, but still shows interest in the pictures. Will almost bursts into loud laughter at the Wendigo's affronted reaction to the picture he shows him of a picture of the Wendigo.

Grotesque and overly monstrous in its depiction, absent of the majestic beauty of a true Wendigo's form.

“Wendigo.” Will informs the Wendigo, pointing to the picture in the book, then at the Wendigo himself. Watching the Wendigo pull back and growl, Will cannot help but huff in laughter.

“Yes,” Will says mirthful looking again at the picture and the book Wendigo's abnormally large gaping maul, “I suppose it's not the most accurate depiction.”

Will flips a few pages and settles back against the bars, then starts to softly read from the book.

Behind him, he can feel the Wendigo settle as close as possible to him, listening to Will read. This soon becomes a common activity of the two. Will bringing the Wendigo many different stories of fantasy and fact. Stories of the village and from towns far away. Though the Wendigo may not understand the concept of books, he seems to enjoy listening to the stories that Will speaks. Or simply likes hearing Will's voice, either way, it is an activity they both delight in. The Wendigo often reaching out to run sharp claws through Will's hair like before, lightly scraping at Will's scalp.

Miss. Alana is slightly suspicious of Will when he returns time and again to borrow books from school, and later, from her own little personal library. But she says nothing to anyone. Will is an inquisitive child with a bright mind, and who is she to deny him the knowledge and delight a book can hold? So Miss. Alana keeps lending him books, happy to see the usually strange and slightly apathetic child, so animated and active these days. The true purpose of his behavior still a secret he hoards with content.

It is during one of these reading visits that Will suddenly turns around, and looks the Wendigo in the eye through the cage bars. He has been reading from the book about the supposed kings of the past, conquerors, and leaders. Great fights in history. Their names that will last forever in time and memory.

A sudden thought strikes Will, and he spins around, sprawling on his legs in eagerness. The sudden movement and action catches the Wendigo off guard, and he retreats his head back in surprise. Usually always on guard, the Wendigo only finds himself relaxing around the youngling Will. He cocks his head in surprised inquiry as to what has suddenly made the youngling so excited.

“I know you can't speak,” Will begins to say, “And that doesn't really matter. I mean, I understand you perfectly anyway. But....” Will pauses, biting his lip in his difficulty to get the Wendigo to understand.

“Names...things we call people and other things, they are important. It makes things real.” Will looks deep into the Wendigo's eyes to express his wish. “I want our friendship to be real. I've been telling you the names of things...” Will motions to the book in his hands by jiggling it a little, causing the Wendigo to glance down at it before looking back at Will, slightly confused now but listening intently in blank gaze.

“Book... here. But...I've forgotten the most important name.” Taking a big breath he looks directly at the Wendigo and points to himself.

“Will.” he says. “Will”.

He then points to the Wendigo and says “Wendigo”, then back at himself and repeats “Will.”

He does this a few times until the Wendigo tilts his head back a little, considering the youngling...'Will', before him.

Yes, you are Will.

Will smiles, but the new understanding quickly turns into a frustrated frown, making him look at the book on his lap. At the inquiring and soothing hum the Wendigo emits, Will looks up again with a furrowing brow.

“I don't want to keep calling you 'Wendigo'...it seems to plain, too base. Plus, you give a name to something you want to keep. Not that I want to keep you per ce.” Will smiles shyly at the Wendigo. “But you are as good and deserving of a true name as the best of us.”

The Wendigo gives a small growling sound and if possible with a completely motionless expression, makes Will suspect quite strongly that he is rolling his eyes.

I have no need for a silly human name. I am beyond. I am the dark, the wood, and the blood.

Will gives a heaving sigh as the Wendigo puffs himself up, rising as far as the cage will allow, letting off a impressive growl.

“I know, I know,...but I want to.” Will informs the Wendigo stubbornly, dismissing the display of power.

Very well, very well.

The Wendigo settles back down and Will starts to look frantically about the cabin, as if the answer as to what to name the Wendigo will appear right in front of him if he were to keep looking around the confined space. He ignores the amused feeling the Wendigo is giving off, and continues making small annoyed noises as he thinks. He has to admit, his past skills at naming things is not remarkable. The latest dog he had the opportunity to name ended up lazily being called 'Bean'. But Will would never give his friend so mundane a name. He needs it to be as majestic as the Wendigo. It's depiction in books none withstanding.

The Wendigo is a great king of the woods and night...

… king....

The book!

Will lights up and grips the book about kings and leaders in his hand, frantically opening it up and flicking through the pages searching.

“You can have a name from here!”

The Wendigo picks up on Will's excitement, making a rolling light sounded hum.

Concentrating, Will goes through the stories and names, dismissing one after the other. It has to be an unusual name... but not silly or stupid or hard to pronounce...something foreign....

Will stops on a particular name, its meaning is slightly strange and in no way connected to the Wendigo. It is also not the name of a king, but it calls out to him, and rolls off his tongue when he speaks it in his mind. Kings can be corrupt and self serving. This is the name of a leader, a fighter, a great general.

“Hann-i-bal.” Will says.

He looks up at the Wendigo and gives a small smile.

“Hannibal.” Will repeats with purpose.

The Wendigo sits back considering, his entire posture regal and imperious. He then moves forward smoothly. Carefully reaching a few of his long fingers through the bars to rest the fingertips on Will's hand on top of the book. The contented purr he gives Will fills them both with happiness. Will smiles widely, and flips his hand over to grasp their fingertips together.

“Your name is Hannibal.”

So Will gives the Wendigo his name.

Hannibal.

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But unfortunately, no matter how happy Will's visits with Hannibal are, and no matter how much enjoyment they both get from them, the reality of it is, Hannibal is a caged prisoner in a cabin.

Tortured regularly by Mr. Mason.

Although Will and Hannibal try their best to ignore such stark realities while together, neither of them forget. Hannibal, when not with Will, survives, plans, and plots his escape from the cage. He is a creature years and years in age, and he is also a patient one. Willing to wait a long time for his opportunity for revenge on the man-pigs and the slimy man-pig who torments him. Will not included of course. Will is a born jewel among the rough dirt stones, and hereby a beautifully unexpected surprise exception.

Will too, does not forget current circumstances, and although he has come to an acceptance of his role in the death of the white wendigo, and Hannibal's resulting capture and

imprisonment, the past still wounds him inside from time to time. Most of all, when he hears Hannibal's painful and enraged roars during the day when Mr. Mason visits, and whenever he first visitsHannibal that night and sees him in that dreadful cage, starved, and covered in fresh and old wounds.

Guilt is hard mistress to ignore.

He feels even more upset when Hannibal tries to sooth his distress, running clawed fingertips through Will's hair and scalp, like he has discovered Will likes.

It is alright. I am strong. Do not be sad.

Will knows he cannot be too obvious in his liberties with Hannibal and his visits, as Mr. Mason will get suspicious. But he does what he can to treat Hannibal's wounds, reaching as far as he can into the cage, cleaning them, and giving Hannibal fresh water to drink. It is a little difficult but Will does the best he can. But why does Will not try and open the cage you ask? Well for one, the cage is locked with chains and three large padlocks. For another, unlike the keys to the cabin, only Mr. Mason has the keys to all three padlocks. Will guesses that Mr. Mason keeps the keys on him at all times, even at night, and to reiterate, Will is not so brave or stupid as to try and sneak into Mr. Mason's home.

He is also unsure if Hannibal would be able to tolerate the medicine that they use. So Will dismisses the idea of stealing what he may need to treat Hannibal from Dr. Sutcliffe's office, under the pretence of visiting Mrs. Crawford. Neither can he use bandages, or leave anything behind for Mr. Mason to find. He researches natural remedies from what books lent under Miss. Alana's advise. It is not unusual for Will to ask for such books, as he has done so previously in the past so he can treat his dogs when they get injured. It is not too much of a stretch to ask for more books to better his knowledge. The silver lining is that he can indeed use such methods on his dogs, as well as ultimately for Hannibal. So Will secretly treats Hannibal's wounds from natural plants found in Wolf Trap Wood. If anything, the treatment seems to ease Hannibal's pain and help the wounds heal faster, much to Will's relief and happiness. He assumes Mr. Mason has not suspected a thing, as Hannibal heals quite quickly anyway.

Though Will does worry that Mr. Mason will simply try to hurt Hannibal harder in retaliation. A vicious circle.

But such worries are a detriment and serve no purpose.

And no, Will does not go sneaking out at night to gather his supplies.

He has no need.

In truth, it was his original plan, but we cannot forget about the regular trips Will takes with Mr. Hobbs and Abigail beyond The Wall, and into Wolf Trap Wood. Will has no fear beyond The Wall, so he wonders about. Gathering what supplies he can into his leather satchel during these outings. Abigail often helps him unknowingly, incorrectly assuming that the supplies are for the dogs, or for Mrs. Crawford's use in natural smaller healing.

In this, we remind ourselves that this story is being told during times old in a rustic village. No nasty cough syrup and cream ointments here for little cuts.

Mrs. Crawford does however, catch onto Will's sudden hobby of natural healing. Even going so far as to help him prepare better some of the natural remedies, for easier application on particular wounds. Will is so sure of his deceit, that one day during one of his outings, he asks Mr. Hobbs for advice on what natural remedies for use to sooth burns. It seems that Mr. Mason has found delight recently in burning Hannibal with hot metal, and Will despairs over the newer wounds, so much more painful than the usual slashes, cuts, and bruises. At the look on Mr. Hobb's face as the older man considers the boy before him, Will feels a trickle of fear run down his spine. Could it be that Mr. Hobb's suspects his true purpose? Mr. Hobb's does look after the dogs for Will on a daily basis after all, and can see clear as day that they are all healthy, and in no need for any treatment.

But Will needn't fear.

Although Mr. Hobb's does indeed have his suspicions about Will's behaviour and actions as of late, he could not care less about informing the villagers, nor Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, Mr. Mason, or Mayor Purnell. Will, he wisely infers is a boy of the wild and wood, and Mr. Hobbs enjoys watching the boy blossom, almost as much as he enjoys watching Abigail in her growth.

Will, at the end of it, feels only the relief by his sort of ally in the quiet Mr. Hobbs. Nevertheless, he scolds himself in his hubris and makes note to be more careful around others. Will learns from Mr. Hobbs about the aloe vera plant, and how to mix it with honey to sooth burns. He is ecstatic when Mr. Hobbs informs him about the wonderful plant 'comfrey'. How to find it, and how to prepare it for use in numerous types of wounds.

Both Will and Hannibal find simple pleasure and comfort during the treatments. Having been grant permission to touch Hannibal at his leisure, Will soon finds himself taking slight liberties. They have already held hands many times, at least once at every greeting, so Will in turn lets Hannibal touch him whenever he wishes. Both relishing in the natural desire to gain physical comfort and intimacies as well as mental in one another. Their differences nonexistent in the dark shadowy cabin.

So naturally, after a couple of treatments, Will finds himself running his hands over Hannibal's arm, chest, legs, and face for a short time after he finishes treating the wounds. Hannibal's smooth obsidian skin, fascinates Will. Almost as much as Will's blood filled pink skin fascinates Hannibal. So soft and delicate, but warm and sensitive, prone to goosebumps and involuntary shivers.

One night, they do nothing but run their hands over each other. Hannibal learns about Will's ticklish spots, delighting in Will's childish reaction as he squirms and giggles softly. Hannibal in turn, ducks his head as far as he can in the cage, and allows Will the honour of running his hands over his horns. The antlers are strong, solid, and sharp. Will happily explores their shape, smiling at the sound of Hannibal's purr. They feel smooth yet velvety at the same time. Miraculously, it seems the antlers can be felt directly by Hannibal when touched. Will grieves for the broken piece that Mr. Mason managed to snap off, and is still hanging on the cabin wall.

Hannibal once sits with his back to the the cage, and allows Will to mourn over the brand Will can see clearly now on Hannibal's back.
It has been poorly done, and poorly healed.

The ugly scarring tissue mars Hannibal's beautiful night skin. Curious, Will borrows Molly's copy of the 'holy writing'. A small put together book that Mr. Mason gives to all of the village folk since his arrival years ago. In it contains all of the 'holy teachings', as well as purification rites and practices, and a detailed description of the hell one is subjected to if they do not follow the written holy practices and words. In it also contains symbols of power. The more powerful 'secret' symbols ones only Mr. Mason hoards the knowledge of. Will borrows a copy from Molly. His own copy having had the unfortunate accident of being thrown with malicious purpose, into a lit fireplace the minute Will received it from Mr. Mason's craggy hands. Will links some of the symbols to those painted on Hannibal's cage, and some carved on the instruments in the cabin. The one on Hannibal's back represents 'evil'.

Will often likes to tickle the brand and make Hannibal purr.

On one visit, Will presents himself in front of Hannibal with a split lip and black eye. There are other bruises too on his torso, but his clothes cover them. Hannibal can sense Will's pain, the sharp spikes in his aura. Will sits close to the bars and allows Hannibal's fingertips to stroke all around his face, lightly trace his lips, and caress the injured flesh. His worried and concerned hums soon change from a low melancholy, into harsh growls.

I will hurt those who hurt you! I will bath in their blood and feed you their unworthy flesh.

Will's eyes widen, and he feels enraptured all over again by Hannibal's show of power and strength. He knows the Wendigo would never use such power against him, only against those that would oppose them. It is strange though, how much comfort he gains from Hannibal. How he prefers him over anyone else in the village. Molly's soothing words and hugs and Mrs. Crawford's fussing that evening, Will finds himself only tolerating. Allowing the care and concern with good enough grace, while he ponders whether he can see Hannibal that night. His presence what Will finds he needs most of all. Not to sooth, even though he knows he will get that anyway.

But for Hannibal to help him fight back.

It is Francis who attacked him this day. The two Verger boys still out to torment him, even more so now that they can see how soft minded Will is when it concerns the Wendigo, and therefore, weak. Randall usually leaves Will alone for the most part, attacking only on the rare occasion when he catches Will sneaking onto the property again. But Francis relishes in his 'power' and makes it very well known to all the other boys and girls of the village. Upon hearing Hannibal roar in his cabin again from Mr. Mason, Will shakes his head in distress and stands up to walk away, ignoring the calls of his friends behind him. Hearing Hannibal's pain always distressed him now, the closer their bond becomes. Will is mildly surprised then, when Francis places himself in front of Will and starts on his tirade about becoming and cleansing in fire.

A true acolyte of his father.

Usually, Will ignores these moments, continuing on his way or simply waits for Francis to finish, call Will a 'simpleton', and then part ways. But for some reason, this particular monologue made Will's blood boil and his vision go red.

“Maybe I'll ask father if he can starve the weak animal to death...maybe I'll ask him to do it in front of the whole village, so they can see clear the might of the holy at work, depriving those unworthy.” Francis vows.

Lately, Will has noticed with alarm Hannibal's growing hunger. Mr. Mason only feeding him enough to keep him alive, but never full. Hannibal's concave stomach and protruding ribs make him look forever hungry, but Will can tell. It is starting to wear on the Wendigo. His wounds are not healing as fast, and his hums and purrs are weakening. Hannibal does his best to sooth the reality of it, but Will knows he will have to deal with this issue soon, or his beloved friend will indeed starve to death. Knowing this, makes Will all the more angry with Francis, and those words release something dark inside Will that has been growing.

He throws himself at the taller prideful boy and strikes out with animal like fury.

Will might have walked away for the first time the victor too, if not for Randall's intervention. Will cannot take on both Verger boys at once. So left bleeding in the dirt, Will wishes with all his might for Hannibal to be with him in this moment. Knowing that together, in kinship, they can defeat anything. It seems a bit childish, to invoke the wrath of a Wendigo to help stop two annoying bully boys. But Will will willingly throw himself into hell itself for Hannibal in return, so he reasons its a fair deal.

Francis makes a good point however. Hannibal needs food, and soon.

Giving Hannibal a bit more food seems simple enough in theory. But ends up being more complicated in practice.

Will has no idea what Mr. Mason has been feeding Hannibal, though he assumes its some sort of bad raw meat. Bad for tormenting purposes, and raw meat because it most likely has been provided by Mr. Cordell. Will does not think Mr. Mason will give Hannibal anything too far away from his natural diet, as he would not risk killing his prize catch by accident.

At first, Will plans to simply feed Hannibal more of the same food, so as not to upset Hannibal with something unknown and more all of a sudden. He also feels reassurance that food will be present in the cabin. Mr. Mason being the type of man who likes things ready at hand, even if he never uses it in the end. Will will simply have to be careful to not give Hannibal too much extra and arise suspicion.

He guesses that the food is being stored in the only other room in the cabin. The door closed but not locked that Will can see.

He has never felt the need to go in there, as bad smells he now recognises as rotting meat, always drift out. That, and he has always been more preoccupied with Hannibal than another room with Hannibal not in it.

He greets Hannibal that night, both of them clutching hands as usual. Will smiles as Hannibal motions him closer so that the Wendigo can runs his claws through Will's hair affectionately. Will's pleased smiles fades away to seriousness as he survey's Hannibal before him. He is definitely getting thinner and weakly looking. His already sharp boned face, more pronounced, and Will can see some of the wounds he treated two days ago are still weeping slightly. The flesh under Hannibal's black skin is a dark pink in colour, much darker than a mans flesh, but still flesh raw and broken.

Hannibal's blood is so dark a red its almost black...but not quite.

A questioning rumble, then Will feels the tips of claws touch under his chin and lift his head to meet the winter eyes he adores. Will's responding smile is strained.

“You need to eat.” he says softly. “You're starving Hannibal.”

Hannibal sits back almost imperiously.

Yes...I suppose I am.

Will gives a snort of derision. “You can pretend to be all high and mighty all you want, but even the most powerful of beings need sustenance.”

Hannibal gives an almost sigh in response.

I know my dear one, but what do you suppose can be done about it? The slimy pig so does love his petty torments.

Will senses exasperation, frustration, and slight sarcastic amusement. The voice in his head is dry in humour.

Will will not let Hannibal die, especially from something so mundane as starvation. The very thought chills his chest tight and creates a hard lump in his throat.

He looks over at the unassuming door. The only other place in this cabin.

That must be where Mr. Mason is keeping food and supplies. It would be very much like him. To have something so close and yet so far. Will looks to the door, then to Hannibal a few times, building up his resolve. Hannibal moves his head just so, and Will can see him in his minds eye, narrowing his eyes at Will. On a questioning wary note of sound, more like a low growl, Will is resolute. His chin lifts and his eyes are steel blue. He gets the feeling of Hannibal admiring his form, and the picture he shows, before his words create alarm.

“I'm going to get food for you.”

Will scrambles up to his feet as silently as possible, and with only slight hesitation, moves quietly towards the back door. His legs cramping only slightly from his position sitting down. Behind him, Hannibal lets out a moan of alarm, reaching through the bars at Will to stop him, and coming up short.

Hannibal can smell the death, decay, and sick scent of sour water and wrong coming from the other place every day. He does not know what is behind there, but he is sure of his instincts in that only bad outcomes can come from going near that place. Hannibal does not want his sweet little one to go near there. He is not sure why all of a sudden it is a factor, but he knows his little one is worried about him. He calls out louder this time, his cry demanding and alarmed. He reaches out his hand again in an attempt to grab at his darling and pull him back, but instead brushes against the bars and hisses in pain as the silver burns him. His darling pauses at the sound of his pain, but seems stubbornly resolute, and Hannibal can only watch hopelessly.

Will pauses at the sound of Hannibal's hiss. No doubt Hannibal can sense the smell coming from the room. Will thinks perhaps that food might not be the only thing residing there, but he can't stop now. Hannibal needs his food. The sound of Hannibal inside causes the village guards to bang on the door, and yell into the cabin loud and angry. Will is not bothered unlike the first time they did that. Will always makes sure that the unlocked padlock wont fall by accident, and the village guards never enter the cabin.

Too scared.

Will reaches the wooden door.

The rank, sharp, and sour smell is very prominent now. Will cannot help but pinch his nose in disgust. Choosing to ignore the almost low whines of Hannibal behind him. Will reaches out a trembling hand and pulls on the door.

Nothing.

He yanks again.

Still nothing.

With his hand still pinching his nose and a now embarrassed hot blush on his cheeks, he pushes the door gently which swings open easily. He is assaulted by the rank odor, and can't help himself turning away for a moment to get his bearings. Eyes burning, Will looks back into the room.

The first thing he notices is the iron wrought wooden barrels, rusted and rotting, he guesses that is where most of the smell is coming from. One has its lid cracked open and when he looks inside, can see it is filled with silver items of all kinds. The next thing he notices as he takes a step inside the room is the wooden benches, almost surrounding the whole space. The only thing the benches don't surround is a large bricked fireplace with an iron cauldron. Smears of silver residue is seen inside. Will guesses this is where Mr. Mason melts the metal, explaining the sharp part of the smells. It would certainly finally explain the chimney bellowing black smoke at odd hours. One table at the far end of the room of greasy and sooty walls, has an elaborate and complicated display of glass vials, balls and strange equipment Will cannot identify.

Lamps, without glass covers show where an open flame would burn. This is where the sour smells are coming from.

The whole place feels wrong and disturbing.

Has Mr. Mason been using this....room...to hurt Hannibal? What kind of sick experiments has the cruel and violent man been doing?

Smears of blood and more wicked looking instruments line the walls. The smell is starting to make Will choke and splutter. He comes to the conclusion that he is standing in the middle of an evil place. There is clearly no food fit for Hannibal here, only danger and poison. Sick to his stomach, afraid, and disturbed at the shocking scene, Will backs away. Retreating from the room, his head whipping back and forth, for a sign of surprise danger.

Will should have turned and ran back out with his eyes closed.

Head moving towards the wall next to the door, a blind spot until now. Will's eyes go wide with a violent shocked fear, his nose flairs, face pale, and a gurgled scream gets stuck in his throat.

What he sees sitting on top of the bench is an horrific crime against nature.

Will's body jerks and he heaves, bending over, and only just manages to swallow back down the bile and vomit that surges up from his stomach. His entire mouth and throat burns.

Sitting on the wooden bench, in large yellow oil filled glass jars are pieces of what was once the beautiful white wendigo.

A hand, a piece of antler, another piece of unidentified flesh.

But how does Will know this is the white wendigo?

The head.

Floating in one of the jars, now grotesque and cut up, chunks missing.

Will places his hands over his mouth in an attempt to once more stop contents coming up from his still rolling stomach. He stumbles out of the room, tears pouring from his eyes, but he cannot get rid of the sight in his minds eye. It sears in completely and blinds him. His tears feel like burning oil on his cheeks and the memory of oil filled jars makes him whimper in pain. Nightmares while awake. His body is ice cold and frigid, and he cannot seem to stop hyperventilating. Will lowers his hands from his mouth shakily, and groping, not looking behind him, he slowly finds the door and shuts it without looking. He takes a few steps forward after and simply stands there, completely horrified, whimpering softly though he is dead to himself do so.

A low moan of worry finally breaks through his comatose state. Hannibal is as close to the bars of the cage as he can be. Will looks towards him with fresh tears flowing down his face, sobbing.

“You're right.” he whispers. “I shouldn't have gone in there.”

Hannibal reaches out a clawed hand through the bars, beseeching out to Will, to comfort and

sooth whatever pain he can see in the young boy. Will's body feels heavy as he moves towards Hannibal, collapsing next to him and reaching arms out to clutch at smooth black skin, and hands. Hannibal puts his head as forward as he can go, only just managing to touch foreheads with Will through the bars. Will smells a bit of burning as some parts of Hannibal's skin brush against the bars, but neither of them bother to pay attention.

Will's pain right now is absolute, and Hannibal moans low and continuous, as if the very sound of his voice can absorb some of the pain Will's aura is emitting. Will finally lets go, and sobs uncontrollably against Hannibal.

“I'm sorry.... I'm sorry.....” he repeats over and over. Unable to get the image of what he has seen out of his head.
Such an horrific and cruel end for such a beautiful and pure being.

Will finally, after a time, looks up shakily into Hannibal's milky eyes, so close.

Here, Will can see that his eyes are completely pupil less, which he knows will burn with a brilliant burnished sheen when angered, like that night. They are beautiful eyes that suck him in and Will falls deep into the safety of the abyss. Will would think that the pain and torment clearly shown in his eyes and soul in that moment would scare people away, unable to meet his eyes.

But not Hannibal. He is not a person anyway.

Hannibal seems to swim in Will's pain. Looking Will straight in the eye, his low moan turns into a purr of both soft delight and comfort. Gently swiping the tears from Will's cheeks, Will watches in awe as Hannibal puts the tip of his claw to his mouth, a dark red tongue darts out, tasting Will's salty sorrow. Will does not need to speak in words, in one look, Hannibal knows what Will saw. They grasp hands and Hannibal growls. The sounds brings forth a watery smile from Will.

“Yes. We will make them pay in equal kind.” Will murmurs.

His panic attack over with, and although the memory will haunt him for the rest of his days, Will finds himself full of calm righteous anger and sorrow. He wearily rests his forehead back on the bars, tired from the emotions that are still churning and melding inside him. He closes his eyes and allows Hannibal to gently stroke his head and hair with his claws. Hannibal's purrs are low and superior.

Hannibal is pleased with Will. Even in sorrowful terror he is finding comfort in the dark, embracing his righteous nature to punish those in kind. His pain is beautiful, and it endears him to Hannibal rather than sicken him. It is not weakness, it is a birth of strength. So much potential. Will may be born of those lowly creatures outside, but his spirit is much more.

There is so much my dear boy, that I would like to do with you. For we are more than those who would hurt us. You can go beyond, my dear one. For I care for you, not those I would see fall down bloodied at your feet.

Very poetic.

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Despite the memory of the horrific demise of the white wendigo haunting him in his night mares when he sleeps, Will continues the days following as usual.

The Crawford's, Miss. Alana, and his friends do notice how quieter and melancholy he has suddenly become, comparing to the last few months of high spirits and happy humming. But they do not pay it too much heed. The village folk accustomed to Will being more unusual in his high spirited and almost childish joy, than his returning to blank stares into the distance and a solemn face. Will will never be known as a bright and cheerful child, at least when not in the company of his beloved dogs. It pains Will a little that no one ever bothers to understand the parts of himself deeper than his outer facade.

At least no one except Abigail. Yet he cannot bring himself to place blame on them for not wanting to fully understand.

Sometimes the darker side of Will frightens him beyond anything.

But he is lucky.

He has Hannibal.

The burgeoning relationship of himself and the Wendigo starting to show and crack through Will's person mask. Like black viscous liquid seeping through cracks Will never noticed before. His almost hyper focused obsession with Hannibal harboring his every thought and feeling day after day. Will can feel himself getting stronger, not in physical form per ce but in spirit and soul. More sure of himself now that he knows he is not alone anymore. The thoughts that he gleans off of others that usually sour his mind and overcome him, are now mere whispers.

Night after night he speaks with Hannibal, ridding himself of the pitiful thoughts and feelings of others so that only Will remains. It is as if Will has been a rudderless boat aimlessly pushed and pulled by the tide in the vast sea, and only now with Hannibal does Will posses the tools of an oar in which to direct himself.

Will becomes aware very clearly of how bold and sure he is becoming when Francis approaches him one day after he sees Will openly tearing after hearing as always Hannibal's roars of pain.

“You are weak and unbecoming, to cry for such a thing! You will be the next to burn under the purification of the light.” Francs lords.

Like before, Will feels himself fill with red hot anger. Yet this is not like the last time at all. This fire burns hotter, brighter, more dark and deadly, and Will can feel it fill his eyes like winter ice water as he moves his gaze up to Francis. He is not sure what look is exactly on his

face, but he assumes it is not pretty. Through his link to Hannibal he can feel a power grow. If only Hannibal be here with him now. They would overcome something so little and feeble as the righteous Francis. Yet Will feels as if Hannibal never leaves him now.

Not really.

Will need only take one single step forward for Francis to step back, slight fear in his eyes. This is not the Will that he is used to.

Will feels another set of eyes on him, and looks to the side, just behind Francis to see Randall standing a short distance away. Randall shows no fear, just smooth calculation and curiosity, like a slaughter animal has suddenly done something interesting, and he wants to know exactly how and why.

Will hears a whimper near him and looks down at Winston lying low at his feet. He immediately crouches down next to his furred companion and scratches his ears, resting his forehead against Winston's.

“You never have to fear me.” Will murmurs low, ruffling Winston's furry neck. “You're the only one that knows my secret, my right hand man.” Winston feels reassured by his master once again and celebrates by licking him all over the face, making the boy laugh and fall back on his butt to the dirt. But when Will looks up again, the faces of his friends causes his laughter and mirth to die.

His friends look afraid.

For they too notice the changes in Will without too much focus, but the scene and the look on Will's face when he stares down Francis, both startles and scares them. Molly is the most unnerved, shocked completely, unable to affiliate what she has just seen to the sweet boy who has been treating her so well lately. Brian looks horrified, while Jimmy won't meet Will in the eye at all. Abigail simply looks worried.

“What?!” Will asks abruptly.

They all make small nonsense sounds and continue playing, abet shakily, and with sideline glances back at Will. Will makes a sound of disgust, not being able to handle the views of others right now. He feels ashamed of his interaction with Francis, and hates that it is others that are making him feel this way.

For standing up for himself? Pathetic. He wants Hannibal.

After standing and saying a quick “Bye, I'm going home.” Will walks away, whistling for Winston. He can feel his friends eyes on his back as he walks off.

“Will!”

Will stops as he hears Abigail's call behind him. He turns.

“What is it Abie?”

Abigail is torn. The change that has spurned inside of her childhood friend fills her with uneasy uncertainty. The squirming uncomfortable boy in front of her as much the same Will of late as the deadly faced one she saw just now staring down Francis. Not that Francis didn't need a good stare down, Abigail reasons logically. But she has never felt afraid of Will before. Is this what her father means by Will growing into a hunter? All Abigail suspects, is that Will has been different since the Wendigo, and judging by the strange sadness that Will shows when the Wendigo screams in the afternoon, could it be that

Will really did find a way to see it?

Abigail looks earnestly at her friend. “You're being safe right? Like I told you to be?”

“Of course.” Will responds cautiously.

Abigail nods her head strongly in response looking down at the ground. Will can feel how conflicted his friend in feeling, and he isn't happy that he is making her feel that way.

“What is it Abie?”

Abigail takes a deep breath and look up again, Will is surprised again to see the sadness in Abigail' eyes. “We're friends right Will?”

At Will's confirming nod, still looking a bit bewildered, Abigail continues.

“That means we tell each other things, and not keep secrets, and help each other right?”

Abigail's eyes are almost pleading now, and Will feels the sick feeling of guilt rise. He wants to tell Abigail about Hannibal but something inside him stops him from doing so. He is especially sad as Abigail is his closest friend of everyone here except Hannibal. But his and Hannibal's relationship isn't exactly friendship in the plain sense of the word. It is deeper, more all consuming. And Will can feel himself starting to go down a path that not even Abigail can follow.

“Yes.”

He is lying. Abigail can tell Will is lying. But she can't bring herself to let it go.

“But we ARE friends right? You're still my best friend.”

Will feels relief. This... he can say with certainty.

“Yes Abie, you are still my best friend.” The small crooked smile he shows her is genuine, and still the same from childhood. Abigail smiles in return and agrees to his offer to walk with him home, Winston bounding back and forth between them with a stick to throw. Abigail feels relief now, she has not lost Will completely yet.

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We should also note, dear followers, that Will is not the only one to benefit from his relationship with the Wendigo. Hannibal too has grown stronger from Will's care, not just from the treatment of his wounds, but from the stimulation and genuine glee Hannibal gains from Will's company. For is it not true that one gets stronger from simply being in the company of the one they like?

It is the same for Hannibal.

For during his continuous torture at Mr. Mason's hands, he need only go deep into his inner memory palace and remember Will's visits. Detach himself from the present, and endure. Hannibal also spends time thinking of all the delightful ways in which he can bath in Mr. Mason's blood and rendered flesh.

But Will is always present with him in these imaginings too... watching...participating.

“Hmmm....” Mr. Mason would twitter with evil slimy eyes. “You are a much stronger little piggie than I first thought...yes, yes you are. But nothing can stop the will of the light!”

The more Hannibal resists it seems, the worse the torture becomes. It is only a matter of who's will will break first.

But in the meantime, we will hear more of Hannibal and Will.

After the disastrous result of trying to find Hannibal food in the cabin. Will knows the only option is to somehow bring Hannibal food himself. This proves again more complicated in reality than theory. Will knows not what Hannibal can eat, nor what Will can safely procure without rising suspicion, and not leaving evidence behind in the cabin. He thinks he has it easy when Mr. Crawford takes him on another fishing trip. Sneaking out best he can that night with an extra fish, he watches Hannibal's indignant reaction as Will offers it through the bars. Surely a Wendigo can eat fresh caught fish?

You wish me to eat this?

Will rolls his eyes, waving the fish at Hannibal slightly. “It's better than the crap Mr. Mason is probably feeling you! It's fresh caught anyway, and natural. You need food Hannibal, you're wasting away.”

The latter being especially true as of late.

Despite the seriousness of the matter Will has to swallow down snorted laughter at Hannibal. As tips of claws delicately take the offending fish from Will, and after another glance at the boy, delicately nibbles and eats away at the fish. The rest of the night goes by as usual, Will sitting back against the bars, chatting away.

The next night however, proves again to Will that nothing in life is easy. After consuming the fish it lasts more than ten seconds before Hannibal promptly vomits it back up in black bile and fish bits. The indignation and affront of the act clearly shown by a distressed Wendigo.

SEE?!

...No fish then....

Will rakes a hand through his curly hair, and goes red in guilty, sheepish embarrassment, feeling the humiliation on Hannibal's part.

“I'm sorry. I guess I'll have to find something else.”

Hannibal pouts snobbishly for the rest of the night, refusing to look Will in the eye. So Will returns back to the village early. He does not think about how Hannibal will get rid of the vomit.

The next few nights, Will tries a few things with Hannibal.

Human food Hannibal will not even touch, while fruits and vegetables get only a nibble.

The latter being a big stab in the dark.

It is the same with any growth Will finds in the forest.

Exasperated and out of options, Will resigns to the fact that raw meat may be the only thing that Hannibal can eat. But the small pieces Will sneaks away are not enough. He dare not attempt to steal too much from the stores in the house. Mrs. Crawford he knows has a keen eye, and would notice immediately if the food she buys, trades, and cooks with suddenly comes up short. He tries hoarding off cooked meat, but by the end of the day it is stone cold, and doesn't last long stored in secret. Hannibal eats it well enough, but Will can tell it depresses him. Such fare not good enough by far for the natural hunter.

He would go buy extra meat from the butcher, but he knows Mr. Cordell is sly and has a big mouth. Will cannot risk Mr. Cordell telling Mr. or Mrs. Crawford of Will's purchases. A few bits for his dog is one thing, a whole steak another. He cannot even use his pack dogs as an excuse. As Mr. Hobbs on the rare occasion that they cannot find food in the forest for the dogs, always goes with him to make the meat purchases. Will not yet fully in charge of the dogs in the village yet. To top it off, Will knows Mr. Cordell is in complete alliance with Mr. Mason, practically worshipping the holy man and always eager to do well in his masters eyes. Will simply cannot risk it, and vows to keep safe distance from the butcher.

Will is exasperated and irritated. He knows he is running out of time.

In the end it is again Mr. Hobbs that proves the saving ally. Will is still not sure if Mr. Hobbs knows of the exact details of Will's actions and motives, or it is simply coincidence.

But Will at the moment in youthful joy, does not care.

On a trip into Wolf Trap Wood to hunt with the dogs, one of them, a medium black and white dog manages to hunt down and snare a rabbit. Showing clear loyalty to Will who hand raised it after it was rejected by its mother, it proudly displays the rabbit in its jaws and promptly dumps it at Will's feet.

Will blinks a few times before looking up a little helplessly with wide smile at Mr. Hobbs. Abigail automatically crouches down to coo and praise the dog, while Mr. Hobbs chuckles in a rare show of humour.

“It is yours.”

“Mine?” Will asks rather stupidly.

All of the rewards of the hunt usually go straight to the village. Minus one of two that are too ripped which go to the dogs, or to Mr. Hobbs himself first to skin and butcher. It is secretly whispered about that Mr. Hobbs butchers better than Mr. Cordell, a fact the latter treats as a thorn to his side.

“I would not be so cruel as to deny you your gifted bounty.”

Will nods, more to himself than to Mr. Hobbs and crouches down. Getting out his own hunting knife from his belt, a gift from Mr. Crawford surprisingly, Will rips and cuts off a leg from the rabbit placing it before the happily panting dog, then ruffles her ears.

“Thank you girl.”

The dog gives a small woof before lying down to consume her prize. Will stands up and ties the rest of the rabbit to his belt.

Mr. Hobb's nods at him in approval before motioning at the both of them. Abigail looking wide eyed at the whole event.

“That cut was a bit sloppy Will. I will teach the both of you how to properly skin and butcher now, it is time.”

Will and Abigail both look eagerly at each other. A shared joy of learning more about the hunt before they follow Mr. Hobb's back to The Wall. If either notice how Will is absently caressing the dead rabbit at his side they do not speak. Nor does Mr. Hobbs batter an eye when Will allows the older man to teach him how to skin the rabbit proper, but refuses to butcher it. Instead observing Abigail practice with one of their earlier captures.

That night, Will visits Hannibal filled with pride. He displays the freshly skinned rabbit in his hands to the Wendigo, before carefully slotting it between the bars at Hannibal's feet. The awe and delight that emits from Hannibal has Will smiling wide, his heart soaring.

Obviously starving but nevertheless, Hannibal picks up the rabbit as if being offered gold, and consumes it with as much grace as humanely possible. Every bite is ambrosia, every burst of blood still fresh like cool water in a desert. Hannibal's moans and small purrs as he eats makes Will sigh in content, when he really wants to laugh out loud in joy. He is glad Hannibal is not showing any vain pride, and did not reject the rabbit. Hannibal is a proud and glorious hunter, being trapped in a cage and being feed by a boy might be humiliating. Will does not think bad of Hannibal, quite the opposite. The chance to help such a hunter in a time of need is a privilege, not a chore.

This is further emphasised as Hannibal looks up, pausing in his eating. He then pulls the rabbit from his mouth, blood glistening there, and with precision and ease Will envies, slices a bit off the rabbit before holding it out to Will. Will immediately shakes his head holding his hands out, before motioning back to Hannibal.

“No, it's yours.”

This is met with a stern hum, before Hannibal tilts his head slightly to the side and again motions the piece of meat out to Will. Will is about to refuse politely again before he flashes on the memory of his actions with the dog who gave him the rabbit this morning. He does not think the dog is lesser than him, nor is he humiliated by the dogs offering, but it seemed bad to not give the dog a reward for her loyalty and kill. Will's eyes widen in realisation, and he looks deep into Hannibal's eyes, sensing only sweetness there. Will reaches out and takes the offered meat. Glancing up at Hannibal again, the Wendigo's arm is back at his side but he is not moving, simply watching Will. Will knows what Hannibal wants. Remembered warnings about eating raw meat in Mrs. Crawford's stern tone float by his ears, but Will pushes them aside with only a momentary hesitation.

He wants this, to share this with Hannibal.

He is a hunter too.

Will slowly raises the meat to his mouth and takes a bite. The metallic taste of blood and smooth raw gummy flesh fill his mouth. The texture is strange, unlike anything eaten before. The taste is similar to when he sucked on a bleeding cut on his hand once, but much stronger. He chews slowly, strangely curious. Should he not be revolted? No, he is not. Will feels strangely elated, like he just passed a test of manhood. Swallowing with only slight difficulty as the flesh tries to stick to the back of his throat, he raises his head to look at Hannibal once more and is blown away by the look on the Wendigo's face.

Eyes are now burning white fire at him, and a sense of overwhelming joy and awe. Hannibal sways his body fractionally from one side to the other and Will gets the feeling that he is being worshiped. Will lowers his head and continues to consume the piece of meat, this time Hannibal joining him in the mastication. What might look disturbing to us is not what is here.

The bond grows stronger.

Will continues to feed, and sometimes join Hannibal in his extra meals.

Extra meat he gets from the hunts with Mr. Hobbs and Abigail. Sometimes the dogs will place something at his feet, a rabbit, squirrel, or some small animal. Will learns how to encourage this act, training the dogs to hunt better and as a pack. The dogs accept Will as their alpha, and are just as happy when Will is happy with them.

One time, Mrs. Crawford wakes early and panics when she finds Will's bed empty and clearly not slept in. She wakes Mr. Crawford who pulls on a coat to seek out the boy. They find him sleeping with the pack of dogs in a giant puppy pile.

Exasperated but relieved and fond, they wake Will and lightly scold him for worrying them so. Though they warn him to not let it happen again, it does so sporadically in the future. A happenstance that both frustrates and makes them sigh in resignation. Will and his pack.

With Winston forever at his side of course.

When the dogs do not bring Will an offering, he still gets meat for Hannibal. Mr. Hobb's teaching him and Abigail to hunt on their own now. To track and trap. Abigail is developing her talent for tracking and hunting, using her bow and arrow to stealthily strike. Will is more of a true fisherman in his hunts. Uncannily knowing exactly where to set a trap, patience beyond Abigail's, to watch and wait until his prey falls. He feels prouder when he gives Hannibal meat from his own hunts. Hannibal certainly shows his pride in Will, and his delight in watching the young hunter grow before his eyes, every potential sensed that day long ago clear now for the Wendigo to see in delightful cerulean bloom.

Their bond grows even greater with every visit. Will is completely free. Often scurrying up to the cage immediately after securing the door, hands outwards to clasp the clawed hands he loves so much.....

….love...

Now there is a word that Will never thought he would use for anyone besides his dogs. He is also not so naive to think that as still a child, he knows all about love and its components. He likes, and he is fond of, would protect, but love? Will finds that the word is overused and for the wrong reasons. You need only look at the love of the sadistic Mr. Mason to know the truth of it. Will made a decision long ago to only use the word when he truly felt he means it. So far, Will has only felt love for his dogs.

But now.....

It is not the same love. The love for his dogs is soft, warm, and fluffy as their fur. A comfort. The love he holds for Hannibal is comforting too, but in an all consuming way. His breath catches, his chest burns and hurts. He wants to open the cage and bury himself deep inside the Wendigo, only there can he be free.

It is an aching love, an obsessional love.

Will, of course is not the only one to feel this. Hannibal too feels the fiery flood of emotions when Will is near. He mourns the rare nights when Will is not, and is overjoyed when he arrives. So different from all the others, he feels a link to the boy through his very soul. Everything in him wishes to cart the boy away into the wood. Hannibal thinks Will will like to live with him there. In nature and amongst his kind, the flora, and fauna, the dark...and Hannibal.

Every day the thought of Will is the only thing that keeps him from succumbing to the slimy pig's torture. Revenge of course, but it is thoughts of Will that keep him strong, Will's face, scent, aura of still the most beautiful colors, like the rainbow mists over a lake. Yet those very colours can change, grow darker, stained a beautiful ruby red and grey clouds, like when Will came out of the door of the place that reeks of the dank and wrong. Hannibal may be the dark

evil of the wood, but he is natural and above all else. Hannibal felt the sorrow of Will and wanted more than anything to comfort him that time. He did as best, and saw the brilliance of Will changing, morphing, to radiate an aura that matched Hannibal's perfectly. The white wendigo was Hannibal's companion for many years, and Hannibal thought himself content. But Will is Hannibal's other half, his other piece, and he will not escape into the wood without him when he breaks free. Hannibal long ago came to mind that Will is not a replacement for the little one lost, but rather a gift for the time to come.

Hannibal is not like man. He does not poke and prod and question a gift given to him, even one so strange as to be in human form. He only knows and is.

Will is his.

That is all.

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Will is sitting with his friends again. Winston of course, is with him. This time, Molly has coerced him into letting her play with his long curly hair, now reaching down to brush at his shoulders. He gets teased a lot for it, and sternly told he should cut it by Mrs. Crawford. But he does not let her. He likes it too much when Hannibal strokes his claws through it and plays with it, fascinated that Will has such hair. Molly is trying to braid it all. He lets her with patient exasperation and amusement while he laughs at Winston frolicking with Abigail who is trying to tie a new leather collar around his neck. She is failing. Brian and Jimmy are scuffling around as usual, playing ball and piggie in the middle with Franklyn.

Then, as if by clockwork, Will hears the roars of pain from Hannibal. His roars are loud, as always, and pierce the sounds of the busy life around him. Everyone goes silent, chills down the spin, a brief acknowledgement of the horrific sound before the rustling movement forward of life continuing. This is a common occurrence now, so much so that no one stops for long anymore, no one except Will.

Since the incident with Francis, no one bothers Will anymore when he cries sometimes as the Wendigo roars. They only look at him with confused and disgusted misinterpretation. Or pity, thinking the roars remind Will of Mr. Graham's untimely demise. But Will can almost feel Hannbal's pain now, and he dreads whatever new injury he will have to sneakily heal on his visit tonight.

Will stands up at the sound, breaking Molly's hold on his hair. She looks up at him in concerned confusion. After a moment when it is clear that Will is making no motion to sit back down again she calls to him.

“Will?”

Her soft voice breaks through Will's frozen anguish, and he looks down at Molly with only watery eyes, tears not yet fallen, and a strained smile.

“I'm fine Molly.”

Will sits back down again, but he is pensive and withdrawn even more so than when he first arrived. Molly continues to plait his curly locks, but this time more for distraction than enjoyment. She does not not want to approach the topic to Will, but she is curious and worries about him.

“Will?”

He makes a grunt of acknowledgement.

“Is it....is it really so bad to hear it?”

Molly knows she did this wrong. Will stiffens immediately and she hurries to backtrack.

“It's just, I hate to see you...you look like your suffering....is it because of your father? Are you afraid? You need not be afraid Will. Mr. Mason has it all in check.”

Will only just manages to stop the look of disgust at the mention of Mr. Mason. He is also irritated and angry at Molly for assuming all this. They know nothing of Hannibal, and are ignorant of the wrong that is happening. Will would not wish Mr. Mason's treatment on a truly vicious creature, let alone on Hannibal. He supposes in the villager's eyes, Hannibal has been killing their kind. But is not this simply the art of nature, the balance that one creature be above another? Man is simply used to being the one on top.

But Will would never speak of such things to his friends, as they can be at times as simple minded as the rest of the villagers, not bothering to think of the bigger picture. Will should not hold it against them, he will simply tell Hannibal of it later, he will be amused Will thinks.

“Yeah Will,” Jimmy joins in seeing Will's blank gruff expression. “You're all good here with friends, and this....crying...it's getting kinda strange.. I mean, we wanna know you're ok and all.”

The last admission is said softly, for Jimmy does care a lot about his friend, though he knows for the most part he will never truly understand they way Will's brain works.

Abigail steps closer to Will, sensing a bit better than the others how uncomfortable Will is at the sudden intervention. She has an idea better than others, and cannot stop the chilling gut feeling that Will has been visiting the creature, the Wendigo, somehow.

“I'm not afraid.” Will states blandly. He holds his hand out to Winston at Abigail's side and the dog immediately trots over to sit by his master. Will runs his hands through the dog's fur for comfort and grounding. He does not like being the focus of attention on good days, let alone bad ones from hearing Hannibal's roars again. He can see through his side eye, the

exchanged looks of silent disagreement that pass through his friends, and cannot help the sigh of vexation that comes out of his lips.

“I am not afraid of Ha-the Wendigo.” Will tries to state as firmly as possible.

“Then why do you cry? Even now.” Brian states accusingly. He ignores the glare that Will sends his way and stands firm. Will looks around for one of his other friends to stop this but they all look at him guiltily. Franklyn is playing with dirt on the floor.
Will tries to divert the accusatory tone by using his own thoughts not seconds ago.

“I wouldn't even put a rabid dog in the hands of Mr. Mason. We all know how sick the man is. The Wendigo is doing what nature has intended it to do. Hunt, kill, eat....”

At this Molly puts her hands to her mouth is sick shock. “You think he eats us?”

Will shakes his head and covers quickly. “It's what Miss. Alana said at the meeting after. What she read. All creatures eat Molly. We are just used to being at the top of the hunger game.”

Molly looks down at her lap and nods her head, but she is still shaken. Will knows he should be gentler with her, but his temper is rising at the lack of understanding between him and his friends.

“That sounds all very fair, but we ARE at the top. It's why the...thing was caught in the first place. It KILLED some of us Will!

And you're acting like, like we should feel sorry for it now that it's getting it's just desserts...”

“The Wendigo is a magnificent being!!!” Will raises his voice at Brian.

“MAGNIFICENT!?! Your sounding just like Mr. Mason! Or a crazy person”

“YOUR the one sounding like him! Talking about just desserts. So you think that we all deserve to burn and be tortured for doing what nature intended?!!! Cause Mr. Mason sure as hell isn't baking it a cake in there!”

“That...thing..ISN'T NATURAL! It chose to attack us! It deserves what it gets! And I think you are hiding something...what, you got a crush on it or something?” Brian sneers.

“You would know all about crushes wouldn't you?” Will retorts venomously, shifting his eyes to quickly glance over at Molly's trembling form. Will has his suspicions and gut feelings, and the minute he brings it to the fore he knows he is correct.

Oh, he hides it well enough his friend Brian, but Will knows he envies Will and how much Molly is for some bizarre reason, sweet on him. Brian always tries to show his own kindness and regard for Molly subtly, but Will notices, he always notices.

Now, however, Brian's eyes bulge at the possibility of his secret being known, and his whole face goes red with humiliated rage. He leaps for Will but is held back by Jimmy, who has

been watching the whole evolving argument with wide eyes. He agrees with his brother on some points, but is not so strong in opinion. Will is his unusual friend.

“What did you say?!?” Brian yells. “You know what Will?! You're are just as crazy as they all say. A weird little boy that should stay in the woods!”

The words that Brian throw his way hurt, they hurt because they are true. The truth does hurt. Will always feels like an outsider to everyone in the village, no matter how much he tries. The truth is he feels most at home in the woods like Brian says. That is why he always visited outside The Wall. But knows he is not alone now.

Hannibal.

His only true friend. The one being that seems to truly understand, accept him, and want his company. The being currently being tortured and imprisoned. Does that mean Will deserves to be in a prison like that too? Will realizes that this is the reason why he cries when he hears Hannibal roar. Not just because Hannibal is being hurt, he understands the logic of that. Hannibal would not be getting hurt if he were free, no...Will is crying selfishly because his one ally, his one friend he loves, cannot be with him to support him now. To wreck havoc on those who would try and bring them down.

But he, like Hannibal, must be strong....

Abigail feels a rush of frightened chill at the look Will directs at Brian. At first she only saw hurt, and involuntarily stepped forward to comfort, but in a split second, Will changed. His form, manner, face, everything went dark and cold. It was the look he had when he faced Francis that time. Abigail knows she cannot let it continue, otherwise both boys will end up starting something they will regret.

“STOP IT!!! BOTH OF YOU!!!” She screams, stepping between them and holding out her arms and hands, separating them. All her fears and worries giving her voice trembling power.

“This HERE is what's crazy! We're friends. We accept each other, no matter what we may disagree on.”

Both Will and Brian are breathing harsh, glaring at each other over her, but are listening. She turns to Brian with her best stern woman look. It would've made Mam Bev proud should she have seen it.

“Brian, for heaven's sake, you've known Will since ages. You know he is our friend and we accept him, weirdness and all. And you know how much Will loves animals, of every kind! It's not wrong to feel sad for a creature in pain, it shows empathy. You know what empathy is? No? Well, maybe you should've been listening when Miss. Alana told us in class, and not making scratches in the table with that little knife yours!”

Brian turns red from slight embarrassment now. The boy knows he spends most of his time at lessons playing with his knife and staring forlornly at Molly rather than listen to Miss. Alana. Properly chastised, he breaks free of his brother with a wrenching of his arms, eyes to the ground, disgruntled, but silent.

Abigail then turns to Will. His brows are furrowed as usual and his stare purposefully blank, but Abigail is happy to see it. Better gruff Will than the monster that has been peaking out lately.

“Will,” she says with a sigh. “I won't try and understand you on this because I can't...But, something is going on with you ever since the Wendigo was captured, and we are your friends! We're worried about you.”

Will lowers his eyes to the ground, slightly ashamed of his outburst. He knows how Brian gets, more than anyone here in truth. But he will not agree to what Mr. Mason is doing, he will not even lie to reassure them.

“You don't understand.” he whispers.

“Then help us to!” Abigail beseeches him. “Help us understand. Because whatever this is it's killing you Will! It's tearing you apart!”

Will gives a little huff at that.

“It...it's not killing me Abigail...Han-...he...it's not dangerous.” Will clamps up but its too late.

The others only see the tortured expression on Will's face, but Abigail hears the unspoken and broken words. Will can only mean such if he truly did know the Wendigo is not dangerous.

It is as she suspects. Somehow, Will has met with the Wendigo, maybe even more than once.

Abigail's eyes go wide and Will knows he has hinted too much. He lifts his head fully, as proud as he can make it.

“I'm sorry, but I'm not going to agree on something that's wrong. You don't understand and I don't blame you for it. But I'm not going to agree...I'm not.”

At that, Will whistles for Winston and walks dejectedly back to the Crawford's.

“Will!” Abigail moves to go after him, but is stopped by Jimmy grabbing her arm.

“Leave him be Abigail.” he tells her softly.

“But-”

“Will is his own. We all know that. Leave him be to sort himself out, no good will come of pushing.”

Abigail sighs, but she can't argue. She looks around. Franklyn, during the course of the spat now sits nears Molly, offering his usual useless prattle and condolence. Brian sits with them putting in his two bits. Molly is starting to cheer up from their banter, but Abigail notices how she keeps glancing sidelong out after Will's retreating figure. Abigail looks too.

“You know...” Jimmy starts to speak.

Abigail looks to him and startles slightly at the seriousness in his face, rare for the usual merry boy.

“I asked mam about Will, you know? That day after I had a spat with him about the insects that Miss. Alana told us about that day. Well, she told me something I keep thinking about. She said 'Will is one of those types of mysterious people on this earth, Jimmy. No matter how well you know them, or think you know them, they always keep a secret part of them to themselves.'”

Abigail looks on at Will's disappearing figure in sad agreement.

That night, Will visits Hannibal. He treats his wounds, then spends the whole night as physically close to him as possible through the bars. Hannibal does not know what has happened to make Will so melancholy, but he does not ask. Simply purring and running his claws through Will's hair, smoothly undoing the plaits Molly made.

“They don't understand,” Will whispers, “they can never understand.”

Hannibal's purr subtly rises.

No, but I do.

***

Will's spat with his friends the day prior he ignores, and so do they. Youths usual resolution to simply forgive, than grudge about and cause unwanted dissent among the ranks. Nevertheless, Will cannot help but feel as if a timer is slowly counting down.

So he makes the most of each visit to Hannibal. Their relationship simply blossoming when in comparison, his relationship with his friends is starting to fracture and splinter.

The spat forgiven, but not forgotten.

Even Abigail is a bit distant. But Will pays no heed. For is it not the most inner secret desire and need to feel wanted by another? To feel as if you are special to another and belong with them in family and heart? That is how deep Will and Hannibal's bond flows now.

To each visit with Hannibal, Will tries to bring something along. Either books to read as usual, now even attempting to teach Hannibal to read and recognize the strange markings on the flat thin bark, wording out each one. He attempts to make Hannibal copy his words, but Hannibal can only growl, purr, and moan. No coherent syllables.

Will, in humorous exasperation suddenly tries to make the same noise Hannibal has just made, back to him. Will thinks it sounds similar. Hannibal startles back in surprise which makes Will clasp his hands over his mouth and roll back from the cage on his bum in muffled

giggles. Hannibal's whole face lights up, sharing in Will's delight and he makes a low huffing noise Will swears is consistent to a laugh.

Hannibal never makes the same noise again while he is in capture, but Will remembers that moment of pure joy with fondness.

It becomes a new game, Will mimicking back Hannibal's language. Not that they need it. Able to communicate perfectly without speaking at all. Will is still not sure if the strange deep voice that speaks in his mind is Hannibal's at all, or if he really is speaking telepathically the things Will supposedly hears.

But it doesn't matter, their connection is real enough.

Will brings toys and flowers, small objects from the kitchen, or wooden unnameable things Will makes himself. Anything and everything that he can whisper to Hannibal the name of and give to him to take, observe, and inspect with curious and intelligent poise.

What is this? What have you brought me now my little one?

Will delights in these moments. He shows Hannibal his beloved wolf tooth necklace.

“I will never take it off.” he states.

It is part of who you are, born of the wild and the wood, honouring the wolf whom surrendered this to you in death.

Hannibal delicately plays with the tooth on the cord around Will's neck. A surge of tingling power moves through him, as the Wendigo realises he has a hold of Will through that very thin tie. But Will is lax, and his smile content. He meets Hannibal's eyes directly with ease now, no longer hiding. He sees Hannibal's reaction and smiles wider, involuntarily pulling back a little, creating strain which vibrates through the thin leather.

“Do you like it? I can make you one too if you like?”

Hannibal purrs.

I would not be opposed.

One week later, Will brings Hannibal his own wolf tooth necklace.

“Necklace...wolf tooth.”.

Hannibal cannot keep it with him. But the appreciation Will feels through his bond when he shows and gives it to Hannibal, warms him.

Thank you for the gift little one.

Will is reminded slightly of the small little gifts and trinkets he would leave for the white wendigo.

But as Hannibal sits in the cage and toys with the necklace, finally allowing Will to reach in and tie it around his neck with slight confusion at the act but amused delight, Will knows this gift is different from the others. Hannibal looks pleased, looking at the necklace on him, then Will's own. They are now conjoined by a physical sign of Will's culture now, not just the blending auras that Hannibal can see which twine and dance whenever Will is near. Will faintly thinks of rings and bonds of marriage, but finds it does not bother him too much.

He is too happy.

He takes Hannibal's hand and rubs it against his cheek, feeling the hand move to slightly stroke and tease. Will goes to bed that night feeling fulfilled and content.

Hannibal sleeps in the cage remembering the feel of the strange tie around his neck, and the happy flaring sparks of Will's aura. He remembers it over and over and over until the stench of pig invades, and the sickly smell of Mr. Mason overcomes the lingering smell of Will.

Mr. Mason slams the door to the cabin open with a bang, and grins, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

He is unusually early.

Hannibal growls menacingly and with blood thirsty intent, but Mr. Mason only tilts his head back and grins wider in arrogant superiority.

“Let's see if I can't finally break you today little piggie.”

Nothing can last forever, and time be a cruel mistress that moves on despite all our wishes for it to stop. To stop on the times when we are the most happy.

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Will notices little by little how worse things get.

Will's actions and treatment of Hannibal finally catching up to him.

A week after Will gives Hannibal his necklace, he visits to a shocking scene. Hannibal is in his silver collar and chains again, but this time, they are not lax. Instead he is spread eagled, arms and legs completely outstretched, and held there by multiple silver chains practically pinning him in the air in the middle of the cage. The cage is too short and Hannibal's head is awkwardly bent at the neck sideways to try and compensate for his antlers, another piece which seems to have been snapped off. But the worst part is the dozens of slices and bleeding wounds all over Hannibal's arms, legs, and torso. Hannibal tries to lift his head at Will's arrival, but cannot, resulting to moaning in both pain and attempted consolation. Will can only stare, completely frozen in shock, breath harsh and loud out of his mouth. He wants to scream and only just manages to put a hand over his mouth so only a muffled cry escapes.

Tears pour down his cheeks at the sight of his beloved Hannibal degraded and placed so. Will manages to stumble forwards and tries to reach out to him. But Hannibal is right in the middle and just out of reach to Will's straining fingers. Will tries his best to stifles his sobs but he cannot help it. He cannot even reach Hannibal to treat him or comfort him at all.

“Wh-a-what has he done to you?” his voice a shaky whisper.

Hannibal makes a sound and it tortures Will. Usually he can make out a voice and language out of Hannibal's sounds, but he cannot even do that. Hannibal's voice right now contains no language.

Red hot rage fills Will.

“How can he do this! How can he dare!” his voice is still low so as not to be heard, but is dark and full of hatred for the true beast that hurt Hannibal. “He is a monster, not you, not me. HE is the monster. A complete and total FIEND!”

Will spends the rest of the night in tears, trying aimlessly to reach out and maybe just touch his fingertip to Hannibal, so that he might gain strength from Will's touch. But it is in vain. Hannibal can only moan softly in pain. Will barely manages to tear himself away the early morning. Desperately fighting the desire to wait behind the door and attack the smug Mr. Mason as he enters.

The next few days are the torment of Will's life. It appears Mr. Mason's patience is finally reaching its limit, and he is almost psychotic in his desire to break Hannibal. Coming up with new and more painful ways to torture the Wendigo. He wraps Hannibal up from head to toe in silver chains, harshly searing at all of his flesh. Will's heart breaks all over again at seeing Hannibal try and wiggle towards him in the cage, every movement agonizing. Mr. Mason then punctures Hannibal's flesh

...every...single...part of his flesh.

So severe dark dots cover him all over. Bleeding profusely as they are small, but very deep.

“We must try harder now won't we? Hmmmm? Yes, we must try harder to sear and bleed you away from existence under the power of the holy light!” Mr. Mason will crow out loud, earning another snarl, weak as it is from Hannibal.

Each night Will visits he is welcomed by a new horrific scene.

Mr. Mason soon starts to completely starve the Wendigo. Will's provisions not enough to sustain, especially with the new torture inflicting harsh damage daily. Sometimes Will cannot even reach Hannibal deep in the cage to give him the food, nor Hannibal reach to grab it. The Wendigo getting weaker and weaker, thinner and thinner, and although his spirit never breaks, constantly spitting, hissing, and snarling at Mr. Mason's advances. His sheer debilitation is crippling. Will's treatment not even putting a dent in Hannibal's wounds now. The beautiful obsidian skin, constantly covered now in dark raw bleeding red flesh, and black ooze. Will's worse fears and nightmares have come forth.

Even the villagers and his friends are shocked to silence lately by the length and sounds of not just roars, but the sheer screams of a tortured creature that echo throughout the village in the evenings. They say nothing but stand still, wincing, children's hands covering their ears until the terrible sounds finally stop. They turn a blind eye to Will's tears and sobs now, no longer having the heart to make a fuss. More and more villagers move forward to confront Mr. Mason, only to disturbingly walk away again, shaking their heads. They turn to Mr. Crawford and Mayor Purnell, angrily voicing their discontent. They see no reason now to not simply kill the creature. Put it out of its misery, and end everything once and for all. Will hears this one evening at dinner from Mr. Crawford who woefully and tiredly tells them about another angry mob of villagers he expelled from Mr. Mason and Mayor Purnells property that day.

“It's getting out of hand.” he grumbles, reaching out and placing his hand over Mrs. Crawford's who comes around to place it in comfort on his broad shoulder. Will hears this with dread, chills running through his very bones. Hannibal is not strong enough, and if desired, Mr. Mason could very well kill Hannibal now. Yet if Will wishes for Hannibal to live, he must put faith in Mr. Mason's madness and desire to torture Hannibal, and not give in to the villagers demands. There is no way to win, and it seems the countdown that

Will can feel ticking in the back of his head is now chiming its finish.

He visits Hannibal that night with a breaking and shattering heart.

Luckily, Hannibal is not chained this time, injured greatly and bleeding, but not bound. Will, in something that has become a rarity for them the past days, is able to reach in and hold Hannibal's hand. Deriving strength from Will's touch, Hannibal is able to crawl forward. Mr. Mason has cracked both of Hannnibal's legs. Will lies flat and presses his face to the bars, holding Hannibal's clawed hand reverently. He meets white eyes now gone dull and muddy, and tears well and fall freely down his face, gasps of unsteady breath tremor his body.

Will

The voice sounds so weak in his head. Will closes his eyes in pain and places a sweet soft kiss to Hannibal's hand. The wrist is so thin it can easily fit through the silver bars now.

“You can't stay here any longer.” Will whispers softly, his voice catches and he places Hannibal's hand to his cheek. “You're going to die if you stay, he will kill you.”

A spark of fire appears in Hannibal's eyes.

He could never. I will never fall to such a pathetic pig.

Will gives a watery laugh. “Of course.” he smiles, “Of course you won't.” He looks down again for a moment before speaking gravely. “But you're not meant to be in here Hannibal. I thought....I thought....this could be forever. We could stay this way forever. But it's a foolish dream. You belong in the woods....in the wild. I can't keep you.” Will nuzzles his face against Hannibal's cupped hand, eyes closed now, for he cannot bear to look at the eyes that only ever look at him in fondness. The winter eyes of the one who has come to mean so much to

him. Will swallows down the large lump in his throat and speaks the words that tear apart his very soul.

“You need to escape Hannibal.....it's time for you to go home.”

***

Freeing Hannibal is just an impossible a task now, as it is the first time the idea crossed Will's mind ages ago.

It took Will months to be able to visit Hannibal. Now, Will does not have months to accomplish a task that is all the more difficult. As he lies in bed dirty tears still tracking stiff on his cheeks, he contemplates what he will need to free Hannibal.

He will need to figure out how to get Hannibal out to Wolf Trap Wood to begin with. Will knows many plans fail because people never think of the getaway, only of the break out. His spot on The Wall is the best bet. Still out of the way of the gates and guards and in perfect position. He figures they have not fixed it proper since Hannibal is imprisoned.

There would be no need.

Will will have to check it out, and most definitely make the hole big enough for Hannibal to fit through. He will also have to find the best route to get Hannibal quick through the village from the cottage. Not to mention out of reach of Randall.

Will's lips curls. Since his incident with Francis, the Verger boys have been keeping their distance, but Randall is still patrolling around at night. All around the village instead of just around Mr. Mason's house and property. Will is not sure how much Hannibal would be able to help in taking the irritated boy down should Randall spot them. Hannibal is very weak, Will will have to do most of the heavy lifting and help Hannibal. This will certainly be difficult. To top it off, Will needs to figure out how to distract the guards so he can get Hannibal out of the cottage and across the small field without being seen.

Will heaves a big sigh.

Not even mentioning the most important factor. How is he to get Hannibal out of that bloody cage! Especially if its one of the nights Mr. Mason decides to completely chain Hannibal.

Will groans softly and places his hand over his eyes, rubbing. The whole thing is impossible.

Winston, hearing his masters distress, wiggles over from where he settled at the end of the bed and flops his head on his masters chest. Will huff a laugh and pats the dog lovingly.

“You'll help me won't you Winston? You'll help me get Hannibal home.” The dog is always there for Will, having gone with him night after night, at every visit, sitting loyally at the

edge of Mr. Mason's property, waiting for his master to finish. Winston has also gotten used to the strange winter and blood smell that covers his master after such visits.

“Friend.” Will told him, as Winston snorts into his hand, snuffling at the new smell. The blood smell has Winston's nose twitching in irritation, but continuing pats and consoling from his master has helped him accept it. Now, at his masters voice, his tail flops lazily side to side on the bed in acknowledgement.

Will smiles, and drags the dog upwards and closer to his side so he can snuggle his face and hands into Winston's fur, cuddling him as he lets himself fall asleep. Winston licks his masters face once before settling down, happy to be cuddled. As Will feels his body settle, his worries start to fade. He never gave up when he wanted to see Hannibal the first time. Even though the possibility was just as dire, risky, and impossible, so he will not give up now. Especially since the situation is a matter of life and death. Will will have to figure it out, one step at a time.
Will has to save Hannibal.

***

Will goes by his spot on The Wall the first chance he gets.

He is right in assuming nothing much has been done to fix it. The main part of the hole is covered by its planks once again, and secured by a single nailed down board across it in a diagonal. The next time he visits, Will brings along some of Mr. Hobb's tools he 'borrows' from the shed he and Abigail frequently explore. Slowly, he makes the hole big enough he thinks Hannibal will be able to squeeze through. The plank he puts back, but rotates the nail to make the hole bigger. The plank now sits in place, but the nail is loose and can easily be removed if yanked hard enough. Will figures if anyone looks to examine it, they will assume it has come loose from the elements. It takes a while, but he also uses one of Mr. Hobb's special tools, a thick scissor type implement to cut at the metal mesh and wiring on the other side of the wood. Cursing all the while at the use of the tool and cutting himself in the process, he finally manages to cut a decent enough size away. Working skilfully, he uses very thin string to tie the cut away piece back in place. Despite his grumbling, the piece cuts away faster with the tool than with his own knife like Will previously had to do.

The next step is the route from the cottage to The Wall. This takes a few nights of wandering and watching. But finally he finds the quickest and perhaps the safest way. Will keeps reminding himself that he will have Hannibal with him, and will not be able to use some of the routes he could have gone if he were by himself. Randall is a risk no matter how many times Will ponders for a solution. Randall's nightly ventures are sporadic and random, with no pattern that Will can conceive. His only hope is to keep Winston with him, and have his loyal friend warn him should Randall or anyone else be approaching. Perhaps with enough time for him and Hannibal to get away or hide. Its risky, but he has every faith in the dog that can be silent and stealthy as a mouse. Will debates also teaching Winston how to make a diversion, a skill that might come in useful anyway.

Will's next problem is the guards. On first thought, Will can do something loud and daring. Set fire to something, or release some of the farm animals. But this might not work, as there is still a lot of field to run across with Hannibal. He would need a continuing distraction, plus too big a distraction can alert and attract too many people. Will supposes he can drug the guards, but he will have to make sure all are drugged at the same time so no one gets a chance to alert the main house. He can go in himself and speak with the guards, offer them drugged drink and food. But such an act might raise suspicion, especially coming from Will Graham. He can drug the guards at the stables....somehow, and knock out the others guarding the cabin. Depending on Will's strength and skill, but it is a better idea than leaving things by chance. Will is strong enough.....he has to be strong enough.

He drags his hands through his hair and groans in frustration. It is a childish plan, a simple plan, but the best he can think of. He knows the guards, knows all their patterns, and they will not expect Will. He knows which guards he will be able to separate and knock out, and those he will not even attempt.

The biggest issue, and the one Will is putting off thinking about until the last minute, is how to get Hannibal out of the cage. The cage locks are many. Will must unlock 4 very varying locks in order to free Hannibal. He checks them out as quietly as possible at night.

One is a strange sort of padlock, the other a simple latch mechanism, the other another padlock but much larger than the previous, and the last a simply key hole lock that opens the actual cage. The other three hold chains around the door that will slide down loudly when it unlocks if Will is not careful. He spends many agonizing nights trying to figure out how to free Hannibal from the cage.

When he is not encapsulated, Hannibal often reaches through the bars to gently stroke Will's furrowed brow. This gives Will both courage and comfort, as much as Hannibal's deteriorating health continuously alarms him. While he has been going about in his mission for escape, Will still visits Hannibal at night too. Splitting his time between both. Will treasures every second more now with Hannibal, especially with the escalating torture Mr. Mason is putting the Wendigo through. But Will also understands that Hannibal needs to get out of the village more. So his visits at the beginnings of the planning are shorter. Despite that, Will is still running himself ragged, the stress clearly getting to him. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford can tell by Will's daytime sleepy conduct for the past couple of weeks, that he regularly goes out at night.

Mr. Crawford is unconcerned, boys will be boys as such.

Mrs. Crawford purses her lips sternly but knows she cannot stop Will. Instead she sends him to bed early, of which Will is grateful for.

The conundrum of the cage locks stump him. There is no way he will be able to get inside Mr. Mason's home, let alone find out where he keeps the keys, let alone steal them in safety.

Too many chances of things going wrong.

Since the last disastrous attempt to speak with Reba, Will knows better than to risk both suspicion and the wrath of Francis to go down that road again. Plus he doubts Reba would

know much nor help him for reasons he will not share with her. He contemplates speaking with Abigail and gaining her help. Of all his friends she would be more likely to understand than Jimmy. But the worried and wary looks she throws him now make Will not want to risk their friendship, and more importantly, Hannibal's safety by putting it on the line. Despite the fact that two hands would make this endeavor easier, he will simply have to find out how to break the locks himself one at a time whilst not giving himself away.

Will sits with his forehead to the bars, and closes his eyes in frustration during one of his visits with Hannibal. The Wendigo is once again chained up tight in the middle, but

Will can feel his cool presence clearly in his mind, the golden light of their own world. He jingles softly one of the padlocks, playing with it in stupid hope that it will magically unlock.

“I'm running out of time Hannibal.” Will whispers, looking up. Hannibal cocks his head to the side and seems to smile.

I know.

Will smiles in turn. Hannibal is the only creature he knows alive who can still look so majestic while practically starved, chained, and imprisoned. He feels a bubble of pride in Hannibal's nature welling up in him.

As if he too can feel it, Hannibal puffs up slightly. He has a clear idea of what Will has been up to. Will told him directly after all, and they have never misunderstood each other. He has every faith that Will will be able to help him out of his imprisonment. The Wendigo feels shame however. He wrongly thought in past days that he would be able to get out on his own. But he has sorely underestimated the will of the disgusting slimy pig. Hannibal knows he will not last much longer under such torture.

Sensing the shift in mood. Will, without real thought, reaches his hand and arm through the bars in a vain attempt to reach Hannibal in the middle. His face presses deep into metal and he sucks his whole being in inward breath to reach, fingers grasping desperately. He goes bright red in exertion.

Both know it is in vain.

Hannibal lowly growls.

Please do not hurt yourself little one, this is not the time for stupidity. The bars are to small for even yourself to squeeze through.

Will falls back with an irritated growl himself.

What did you hope to achieve by this?

Hannibal's tone is slightly amused and scolding both.

Will looks down at the dirty wooden floor with a blush of embarrassment but remains stubborn.

“Not sure. I'm just...I'm just so angry Hannibal!” Stormy eyes meet Hannibal's and the Wendigo lets out a purr of comfort.

I know little one. You are trying. But you must be cautious.

Will smiles once more at his dearest friend.

“Yeah I'm trying.” He reaches his hand through more gently now, just raised towards Hannibal. Hannibal in return, bows his antlered head from the neck. The golden glow of their world flashes in their joined minds, each flash again removing both chains, cage, and objects around until it is just them once more. Only them. For each other is all they need. In their shared existence, a small gentle hand touches the black smooth head in a caress and gently runs fingers up the strong horns. In reality, Will's hands move gently about in the air, and Hannibal's head sways slightly in pleasure. Both Will and Hannibal close their eyes in mutual remembrance of a touch familiar and welcome.

“I'm trying.” Will whispers. “And I will succeed. I promise.”

Hannibal's purr echos in the golden space, and neither move an inch until it is time for Will to depart.

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Typically it is Mr. Hobbs again who provides Will with the means. Will analyses each lock closely on Hannibal's cage. He then makes a habit of sneaking and breaking into Mr. Hobb's shed. As done so many times before with Abigail. But as with his previous sneaking in to gain metal cutters for The Wall, Will's purpose for this sneak visit is more nefarious. He can only gather two tools at a time to sneak away with and try on the locks. Most of the tools Will has no idea of its true purpose, but he cares not. So long as they do the job of breaking the locks he needs. He must be careful to not break the locks before he is ready though, and not leave any marks that would suggest someone has tampered with them.

He lets Hannibal see and touch the tools as well. Delighting in Hannibal's curiosity with them. Will notices he is wary at first, probably because some of the tools looks like the instruments Mr. Mason uses here. But the more he familiarizes himself with them, the more confident Hannibal seems to be. Will marvels over the intelligence that the villagers fail to see in the Wendigo. Will tests out some of the instruments on chain links and things around the village to test them. The villagers leave Will be for the most part, only giving him a glance to make sure his unusual actions are not effecting their own day to day lives. In a week, Will discovers out how to possibly break apart two of the four locks.

It is clear that there is no room for error once Will decides on the night to break Hannibal free.

Mr. Hobbs either does not notice the sometimes removal of certain tools, or he does not say anything. He continues to take Will and Abigail on their hunting outings, to teach them new techniques and amusing enough, teaches them the purposes of a few of the tools. If Mr. Hobbs is suspicious about Will's overly keen interest in those particular types of lessons, he again says nothing. Not that Mr. Hobbs is a man of many words to begin with we must admit. But things have never gone too easy for Will.

One night, sneaking in earlier than usual for his foray of thievery to try another potential tool, proves to be the downfall of every reckless assumption that one will continue to remain unnoticeable.

Someone notices Will. following silently as he breaks into the shed. Will is just reaching up for the tool when a small shadow flickers on the edge of his vision, obscuring the natural moonlight coming through the cracked open shed door. That, and the usual uncanny sense of someone behind you. Will whips his head around and grabs the closest tool to him in ready. The shed door swings wider in a wincing long creak, a shadowy figure of a person clearly outlined now.

“I knew it!” a voice hisses.

Will's whole body goes first lax in recognition of the voice, then immediately tight and alert upon the realization that he is caught in the act.

“Abie?” he whispers stupidly.

Abigail shifts forward and her face is seen stern and angry in the moonlight beam from the only window in the shed.

“I knew it!” she hisses again, advancing upon Will with angrily pursed lips and a finger pointed out accusatory at her dear friend before her. Who despite everything, cannot help but cower a little.

Hell hath no fury.

“I knew you were sneaking in here! You're always too far interested in the lessons with tools. I noticed some of them missing too! Though I'm not sure why father hasn't said anything. And it's no wonder you never wanted to sneak in with me anymore! You were doing it on your own! Without me! Why would you do that! Why are you doing this! You're stealing Will! I knew it! I knew it I knew it!”

Throughout her rather still quiet rampage, Will recovers his composure and let's her have her tantrum. It is understandable. The sheer fact that she obviously has not alerted her family and confronts Will herself alone, shows her loyalty to her friend. Not dobbing him in even now. Still it takes a few placation's before Will can get a word in of his own.

“I'm sorry Abie, I'm sorry. But I just need to borrow some of these to use. You noticed them gone so you must have noticed how they always came back after a day or two at most.”

Abigail is still glaring, but she grudgingly admits that the tools have come back. Plus Will, for all his unusual behavior, especially of late, is never the type of person to do something so low as to steal. Mam Bev's pies non withstanding, and a piece of fruit or two from the orchard farmers also not counted. Technically, Will has not stolen either.

Abigail's initial anger recedes and instead she gets right to the heart of the matter.

“Why Will?”

The look on her face is clear and true, Will's resolve on the matter crumbling. He does not want to risk telling her but knows catching him now, Abigail will not let the matter go anymore. Plus Will does not want to lie, he is not ashamed. He hopes upon hopes that Abigail will not expose him to the village. So he takes a deep breath and answers simply.

“I've been borrowing the tools to see how I can break a part the locks on Han-...on the Wendigo's cage.”

Dead silence ensues the shed. Will stands taller, unapologetic and unafraid, while Abigail's eyes are slowly widening.

“I knew it...” she repeats again in a harsh whisper. “You—yo--...how Will? How can you do something like this? I know how yo-...but..it's a monster Will!” Abigail's voice never rises and that alone seems to add to the horrific expression on her face.

Will however, is disappointed and irritated at the immediate judgement from his friend. The only one he thought would at least try and understand a little of what him and Hannibal is about. Or at least be more open minded. Not that he blames her, but he cannot help the dip of sadness in his shoulders at her words, or the anger that swells in him on Hannibal's behalf.

Will looks straight at Abigail.

“He's not a monster Abie!” Will growls angrily. “He's just like any other predator of the wild-”

“He eats us Will! He intentionally hunts us!”

“So?” Will challenges. “We hunt those under us every day! He's smart Abigail! He isn't some mindless killing thing. He thinks, he knows, he feels, he hurts...” Will adds chocking with emotion. Tears start to fill his eyes, it is as if all of his secrets regarding Hannibal, all of the things he wants to tell people about him come pouring out. Will closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, gaining control.

Like Hannibal would.

“The only difference here, is that we are used to being the hunters on top. It scares us that we have finally found a predator worthy enough to call us prey.”

Will's face is stern and his voice clear and dominant. Abigail is taken aback by the power of it, and the logic.

“You sound like my father.” she whispers sadly. But she can't deny the reasoning, even as much as she wants to. All of her worst theories about Will are right before her. His voice, the way he speaks about the Wendigo creature, almost tenderly, more so than he ever has for another being besides his dogs.

...besides her.

The fight is drained out, and Abigail only has one more confirmation to make to make things completely clear. She noticed his slight slip earlier on his first confession.

“You've been seeing it haven't you? All this time. Sneaking out onto Mr. Mason's property.”

Will see's no reason to deny what is out in the open.

“Yes.” he states plainly.

Abigail nods mutely, eyes downcast. Inside she has known all along, with Will's strange behaviour and reactions to when they hear the Wendigo roar in the evenings. Though she still has her own reservations on the Wendigo, she trusts Will is not about to place harm on the village. W

ill may have changed over the months, but Abigail cannot believe he is the type of person to cause intentional harm to others. That part of him she is still completely sure of. Plus, he is still her best friend.

Awkward tension stales the shed now.

“So...” Abigail says. “What's he like then? What have you found out?” Her head cocks to the side, still wary, but curious again.

Will smiles in response. Now this is the reaction he wants. The usual curious Abie that he can always talk to about strange things. Even so, Abigail is still surprised at the sheer warmth and joy in Will's face as he speaks about the Wendigo. Surprised, and if she is being honest, a little bit jealous.

“He's so beautiful Abie. So majestic and big and he's intelligent Abie! I've brought him all these books and music once too! I've brought him toys and puzzles and he's solved them.” Will sighs and looks down at the floor blushing slightly.

“His name is Hannibal.”

Abigail gains a puzzled expression. “It-.. HE...told you his name?”

“Well, no..I kinda named him, from a book - I read to him.” Will absently swings the tool still in his hand as he speaks, letting the weight of it flow back and forth.

“But he recognises it as his name? Like one of your dogs?”

Will scoffs “Hannibal is a bit more complicated than one of my dogs. But I suppose you're right in a way. He understands me... though we don't really speak in words. I mean I do, but

he doesn't. He just talks normally, for him anyway. But we can always tell what we are saying to each other."

Abigail hops up onto the edge of one of the tables while Will talks. Almost as if this is just another one of their conversations. "So it's kinda like an extra sense communication.

Like really good empathy, you don't need words for that." Will gives a soft smile in agreement.

"Yeah, just like that, I like it."

Abigail smiles in return and then looks down at the ground and bites her lip, swinging her foot absently on purpose. Will can almost guess what she wants to ask next.

"Will this is all very great to hear and all, and I won't push your buttons again with the whole monster thing, but, aren't you afraid? I mean the Wendi-..Hannibal - is still a, well he is a monster in a way Will. From what we know he is dangerous. Aren't you afraid that he will hurt you?" Her tone is apologetic but stern. Will does not get angry this time because he can tell the words are from worry for her friend this time and not prejudice.

"No Abie. Not even that night when I was on the ground. We just...clicked. I knew him, and him me. He would never hurt me. I was cautious of course the first few times, I'm not stupid, but....we could never hurt each other now. I've held his hands, he's let me touch his antlers..." Abigail's eyes go wide with shock upon hearing this, but Will continues on.

"He would never harm me. He's my friend." Will's voice is soft at the end, just picturing Hannibal in his mind.

He can admit further that their bond has gone beyond mere friendship now. Will is both scared and elated to think that he is almost in love. But not the silly love he sees in the men and women frolicking in the village. This love seems deeper, more consuming. Then again, Will has never known love before, not really, except for his dogs. But what to call it if not love though is difficult to think about, and more complicated than what Will is willing to put to words. Simplified into such a simple terminology. Either way, such feelings are private, and between him and Hannibal. He will not overwhelm Abigail too much now that he at least has a little understanding.

He thought too soon.

"Will?"

Abigail sees clear that Will is completely smitten with this character, almost like a bit of a crush as well as a friendship. But she spots the tool still in Will's hands swinging around and is brought back with a thud to the true alarming factor here, and Will's shocking first confession. She motions to the tool in Will's hand and tries to ask.

" You first admitted that you were borrowing father's tool to..I mean to-..." she waves at Will and cannot bring herself to continue down this path of thought.

Will glances down at the tool in his hands and confirms. He knows this won't be easy to explain. He can only hope that if Abigail will not help him in any way, she at least will not try and stop him.

“I'm trying to break the locks and chains on Hannibal's cage.”

Abigail is still silent, waiting.

“To free him.” Will finally states obviously after another long awkward silence.

Even though she has already come to this conclusion, upon hearing it out loud, she still cannot help but close her eyes and groan in pain.

“Willll....”

“Abie-” Will reaches out to pacify her, but what has been said cannot be unsaid.

“Will do you have any idea how dangerous that is?! What if he attacks every one else in the village!?” her voice is shrill.

“He won't do that Abie.” Will argues. “I'm just going to free him and take him back to Wolf Trap Wood, where he belongs.”

“Where he will attack the village again! Or can you guarantee that he won't?” the last is said almost sarcastically, and accusingly.

“He won't.” Will argues back. “At least not like before. He wouldn't risk getting caught like that again.”

Will's head drops, and shame pours out of him.

“You know there were two right? You heard from the gossip, two wendigo? The first was just a child Abie! So beautiful and white and pure, like a fairy of the forest. So small and friendly, not deadly at all! I befriended it. But I was foolish, and the villagers set the dogs on it.” Will's voice turns venomous. “It was so horrible Abie. I still get nightmares hearing her screams of pain. They didn't even think! They didn't even look at it before they let fear get the better of them. They destroyed it! Such a beautiful innocent being. It's my fault.”

Tears stream from Will's face in memory. Abigail cannot help but move forward and put her arms around her friend to sooth the pain.

Will sniffs.

“Hannibal heard it's cries. She was his sibling, I think. He came and tried to save her but there were the dogs, and the silver. It's the only thing that can hurt him. He only got caught because of me Abie. It's all because of me.” Will grabs his friends arms and his eyes are wide as he looks at her.

“I need to fix what happened. I need to free Hannibal. You haven't seen what it's like, what Mr. Mason does!”

Abigail looks down and away at Will's face. She cannot stand the tortured expression Will is giving her. She can very well think of what Mr. Mason may be doing to the Wendigo.

Will states it anyway.

“He tortures him. He isn't making the village safe, he is just gloating over his own sick self worth. Hannibal is dying Abigail! He can't keep this up much longer. Being starved, tortured, and bled. I need to free him from us!” Will's determination is clear.

Abigail speaks softly. “I can see what you mean Will but how? It's impossible! You can't get th- Hannibal. From there all the way across the village without being seen!”

Will gathers himself together and steps back, letting go of Abigail. He clears his throat and takes a deep breath, retaining composure once more. This train of thought is clear.

“I've figured out a way, at least as much as I can. I'll create a distraction slightly away from the cabin, maybe at Mr. Mason's house. Then knock out any guards and free Hannibal. I already know the route to take back to The Wall.”

“You're going to use the gap that you had before?” Abigail asks.

“Yes.” Will agrees with a crooked grin. “All that is left is to figure out how to break these damn locks on the cage!” he holds up the tool that is still despite everything, is in his grasp.

Abigail shakes her head.

“Even so, it's still impossible Will. What you plan is impossible and dangerous. Especially if you were caught.”

Will is defiant. “I have to try Abie.” His face turns both hesitant and sly. “You could help me?” he asks tentatively.

Abigail immediately shakes her head and backs away, hands out in front of her, cheeks flushing with embarrassment but she will not budge on this. “No! No, no, no, no, no Will.

I can't! I'm sorry, but I just- I just can't.” She hangs her head, but Will reaches out and grasps her hand. The look he gives her is not judgemental or angry at all.

“I understand Abie.” And he does. But there is one thing still to ask.

“Are you going to try and stop me? Or tell the others?”

Silence.

Then finally, Abigail bites her bottom lip and shakes her head no, eyes wide. Despite everything, even refusing to help, she can't betray Will like this. Not about something that is obviously so important to him. She will simply have to trust that he knows what he is doing, even though every bit of her right now is telling her to run screaming arms waving back home to tell.

With that all said there really is no more to settle between them. Even though he is caught out, Will is glad to have told Abigail. Of all the people on the village, he likes Abigail the most.

Jimmy a close second.

“So how did you figure out where to follow me to?” Will asks as he peruses the shed for another tool he can borrow that might work. “I was very careful.”

“Well, the tools and your behavior of course was suspicious, add that to what has been going on with you since that night,” Abigail explains, “but as to the question of your exact position tonight...”

As if on cue, a scruffy, fluffy, fur ball with an ecstatically waving tail appears in the door way.

“Winston.” Will breaths on a huge grin at his panting beloved pet.

Abigail giggles in mirth. “I would've walked right by the shed to be honest, but I saw this fur ball sniffing a couple of meters away and it just confirmed it.”

Winston bounds forward, and meets with welcoming hands patting and stroking.

“Well it certainly explains why he never alarmed me,” Will says, he should have been more aware about Winston's presence, but he cannot be angry about it. “I'll have to make sure he doesn't follow me when I try and sneak Hannibal away. As much as I usually adore his loyalty and obedience, this is the one time it might not work in my favor.”

Abigail agrees, then hesitates.

“You can drop him off with me that night,” she offers, “just so he doesn't get hurt by accident, and you know he is okay with me. Just... let me know when. I want to know anyway, when you do it.”

Will looks up in surprise at this offer. Abigail will not meet his eyes, continuing to lavish Winston with affection. Will will not push.

“Thank you Abigail.” he says sincerely.

Abigail meets Will's eyes which are only full of gratitude, and some of her uncertainty about this whole ideal melts away just a little. She gives her eyes a roll.

"I've got nothing against *Winston*."

Both give a small chuckle, and Will grabs another tool and lets himself out,

Winston following. Abigail smoothly re-locks the shed door behind them. They sneak by Abigail's home, and Will bids her good night before walking straight back to the Crawford's. Sadly, he will not be able to visit Hannibal tonight as Abigail's impromptu intervention has

taken up quite a bit of time. But Will will explain to Hannibal tomorrow night what has happened, and hopefully all will be well.

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Will finally figures out what tools he can use on the locks, and returns them to Mr. Hobb's shed. Which tools he will take on the night is burnt directly onto his memory. He cannot very well take them the night before, without the evidence of them gone being too obvious. He knows Mr. Hobb's checks the shed every evening before retiring home, and although Mr. Hobbs could be seen as quite the coincidental supporter of Will in his actions and attitude, Will doesn't want to risk anything going wrong now. Not right before the finish game.

The next couple of nights he simply relaxes as much as he can with Hannibal. Telling him all about his interaction with Abigail that night he was discovered by her, and all about his plan. Often fiddling with the locks subconsciously as he speaks.

Not long now?

Hannibal's tone is amused as he spies the delightful child lying on his stomach, face pressed right up to the cage. The sick pig has tied Hannibal again to the middle of the cage, and Will cannot reach. Though the boy often lets his hand and arm rest reaching out to Hannibal inside anyway. Hannibal observes his little one in his plans with great relish and delight. His aura changes as his emotions do. Often, Hannibal will say something and challenge the boy just to see the strike of angry red through his aura. But this is no time for challenging. He cannot wait to be freed from this silver and constricting prison, rest and recover once more in the dark wood of his home....with his new beloved little one at his side.

So many things he wishes to show his little one. So many secrets and treasures that Will is worthy of. Hannibal is in no doubt that his little one can free him. Oh, in his pain and torture he dreams of the day once recovered, when they will return and rain blood and retribution upon the village that thought to destroy him. His mouth waters at the thought every time. He will give the fleshy pigs their due, they almost had him. If not for his little one, whom he gazes upon now still happily chatting away on the floor, the golden light illuminating him in the dark. Hannibal lost his beloved sister of the womb. When he spied her broken ravished body he thought he would love nothing else, his meaning of life to protect only her, gone forever in a sudden bleak and damning future. Yet immediately the great spirits of fate gave him another.

The same, and yet so very different.

Hannibal sees much potential in his little caterpillar. So small yet, but soon, away from all the pigs that smother such growth with their wallowing, his little one will grow tall and strong.

Hannibal will show him the way.

Will hears Hannibal purring in satisfaction and looks up at him in surprise. He so rarely hears Hannibal purr nowadays that such a sound lifts Will's spirits even higher. He lifts his hand in the air and moves it to imaginably stroke Hannibal's antlers. He can feel the impatience and excitement brimming within the Wendigo. Will knows he will have to move quickly once he frees Hannibal, but perhaps he can spend one moment to simply hug his beloved friend close, with no cage between them. It would be an amazing thing, and will make their bond even stronger. He smiles at Hannibal with a wide exuberant grin, reckless with youthful perseverance.

“Not long Hannibal.”

***

Hannibal's brimming excitement results in a very dire consequence. One that forces the hand of fate forward. Mr. Mason senses the excitement in the creature and becomes enraged. He cannot stand to see such power still strong in this disgusting creature after all he has tried. After every method he thinks of to cut the foul thing down. It feels too much like failure.

Mr. Mason abhors failure.

He completely loses his calm holy man persona and in an insane rage, instead of 'purifying' the creature, inflicts torture after torture just to hears its loud and long pained screams.

The whole village goes dead in its tracks. Even those that have only heard its voice and not seen the Wendigo, shudder in fear at the sounds coming from Mr. Mason's property.

No one can move. The children start to cry out loud, the women start to cry out for the noise to stop, while the men voice loudly their displeasure. Even sitting in his office in the mayor's building, Mayor Purnell closes his eyes in shock and pain. He knows this offence cannot continue on any longer. He presses his hand to his chest and tries in vain to settle his thumping irregular heart.

Mr. Crawford, who was at the time trying to break up a fight between two men over 'borrowed' tools, hears the first scream piercing the air and looks immediately towards Mr. Mason's. He abandons the two men who have stopped in shock anyway, and begins to storm towards Mr. Mason's shed where he knows the creature is imprisoned. Mr. Mason will answer for his actions now. There is no way this can go on, and Mr. Crawford knows too soon there will be an angry mob to where he is heading. His face and manner like stone, the only other thought that goes by his mind, besides his determination to confront Mr. Mason is on his poor boy Will. Hearing the creatures screams cannot be good for him, and hearing this now might be torture. Mr. Crawford's heart goes heavy as the screams get even louder and longer. He knows the boy struggles a little being so unusual, but he is a good boy. Who has the potential to be a good man one day if Mr. Crawford has anything to do with it. Mrs. Crawford admitted to him that Will still has nightmares that get worse when the creature screams. Mr. Crawford will not let Will suffer any longer. The boy has shown glimpses of

normality and happiness, and Mr. Crawford will be damned if he lets it fade away. Filled with renewed vigor, he marches even quicker towards the fields.

In the classroom, Miss. Alana is slightly green faced in shock and disgust knowing exactly what is going on. Immediately she does her best to hush and reassure each of her children. A sudden thump of a heavy weight hitting the wooden floor diverts her general attention.

Will Graham.

Face white as a cloud, he falls in a faint on the floor at the sound of his beautiful Hannibal in so much pain. His own, like sharp lightening thorough his heart.

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Back in the shed where Mr. Mason is cackling madly in glee. His followers step back in fear at the site. This behavior is not holy. It is not pure, but sheer madness. Even Mr. Cordell steps back warily.

Hannibal only feels pain. Sick boiling oil like pain that floods his system from the pig in front of him. It is not just the tools or methods he uses on Hannibal, nor even the shame of having such a pig do so to him when confined and bound. But the aura, the madness and evil. In the end, the actual torture only goes on for 2 hours but feels like a lifetime.

It is only Hannibal's very same excitement that brought on this madness that now also saves him, keeping him gripping on by willpower alone. The thought of his little one.

Mr. Mason keeps on his onslaught until he hears the rumbling, banging and yelling coming outside the shed door and all around.

In his mania, he did not notice the sound of the village mob now at his door. He swallows hard and does his best to compose himself. The bleeding form of the creature at his feet, he kicks one last time before fixing his clothing and hair. He ignores the pathetic scared looks his follows give him as he puts on his best smile and opens the door. But even Mr. Mason takes a step back as he faces what might almost be every villager on his property.

He tries to speak but is soon over drowned by the crowds displeasure. He almost has to close the door of the shed again as they all push forward, expressing interest in killing the creature themselves. Mr. Mason knows he went too far with his sudden lack of control. When Mr. Crawford pushes forward to approach him, Mr. Mason sighs irritably. No doubt an intervention will happen and he will be forced to kill the creature. Especially if this stone faced lackey finally manages to convince Mayor Purnell.

No matter, Mr. Mason reasons with himself. He is going no where with this creature anyway. Such constant torture becomes boring after a while. Best kill it now and chop it into little parts to display like trophies like he did with the other one. What better way to show the

power of the holy light than by smiting his enemy. He might even take a few parts back to the big city and boast of his strength to the holy council. Mr. Mason is greedy for a seat among them, which will bring even more status and power of the privileged. He raises his hands to metaphorically embrace all the angry villagers there, and announces his agreement to go with Mr. Crawford and speak to Mayor Purnell about this.

Late that evening, the talk goes smoothly despite everything. Mr. Crawford is a little suspicious by Mr. Mason's sudden agreement to kill the creature and stop the torture. He tries but cannot pay attention to Mr. Mason's rambling and preaching about now having the 'power', to 'smite' and 'save'. In the end, Mr. Crawford thinks it is all worth it. A message came to him about Will's sudden faint, and it disturbs him. The sooner the creature is truly gone the sooner he hopes, Will can completely put everything behind him.

Mr. Crawford makes a decision to not speak of this to Will. The boy is obviously stressed enough as is.

The day is set for the morning after next to 'prepare'.

The only condition Mayor Purnell places on Mr. Mason is for Mr. Crawford to oversee the death of the creature as proof. Mr. Mason refuses. In the end, Mr Hobbs is chosen to oversee as a neutral party member, who can then inform the villagers that the deed has certainly been done. Mr. Mason wants to argue the need of any witness, but he can see that Mayor Purnell is shaken and scared like all the others. The last thing the holy man needs is to be in the bad books, so he smiles sweetly and consoles the pathetic Mayor to his genuineness. Mr. Crawford is not fooled. But he does his duty in dispelling the mob waiting outside Mayor Purnell's home, and reassures them that the creature is no longer anything to worry about. Still, he glares at the retreating back of Mr. Mason as the latter returns to his home.

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Will ignores the hisses and jeers of the other children the next day. Word spreads quickly of his fainting in class, and whispers of 'sissy' and 'weak' float around him now. Not that he cares. He could not see Hannibal last night after hearing his awful screams of pain. More guards for some reason were all around the shed. Imagining the many tortures that were inflicted on Hannibal to have him make such screams come up and circle around his mind, making him depressed. Molly and Jimmy try as hard as they can to perk him up and comfort him, but it is impossible when they do not know the true reason of his pain. Their words that Will is safe from the creature like thorns in a wound. But he is glad he does not have to try and hide his overwhelming sorrow now, either way it is taken. Only Abigail to his surprise, is distant. She alone knows the truth, and she keeps glancing at him and fidgeting. He can tell there is something she wishes to talk about. But Will does not want to speak about yesterday, so avoids her as best he can.

It does not work.

Walking back that evening, a sudden small hand grips his arm and pulls him between two houses and out of sight.

“Will!” Abigail hisses. “I've been trying to speak with you all day!” Her face is thoroughly irritated and cross. But Will does not have the heart to be concerned over Abigail's obvious agitation. So morose over Hannibal's cries, he hopes he will be able to see him tonight to comfort him. In whatever way possible.

“Will!” Abigail hisses again.

Will sighs, but looks at Abigail fully, giving her his full attention.

Even so, Abigail continues to fidget a while longer looking at everything but Will. Any other time, Will would see that this is unusual for his steadfast friend. Will sighs in irritation and moves to turn away, but Abigail grabs him by the arm to hold him in place. The look Will turns her way, he knows is not pleasant. But stubborn, Abigail holds fast and only winces in discomfort. As Will makes to pull away again as further silence from Abigail continues, Abigail cannot help but simply blurt out the truth.

“They're going to kill him.”

This blatant statement of murder makes Will pause completely as it would do any other. Death by premeditated purpose is not natural, never mind it coming out of the mouth of a young female youth. Abigail does not need to explain. Will puts together the statement from their previous conversations, then the slightly guilty, pitiful, and sad look on Abigail's face and makes the necessary connections. Will's stomach drops to the dirt ground and a lump of pure terror solidifies in his throat.

“Hannibal?” he manages to choke out. Not a question, but a confirmation. His eyes widening as he sees Abigail look down to her inward turned feet, and nod rapidly but with barely any motion. Teary eyed as she looks up to Will's alarmed and white face.

“Father came back to the house late for dinner. I pretended to go to bed, but overheard him speaking with mother. H- he- had a meeting with Mayor Purnell. M- Mr Mason was th-there and Mr. Crawford. Th-th-they spoke about the cre-H-Hannibal making the noise yesterday. Everyone is so upset by it...” Abigail tries to explain as best she can but seeing the growing distress pouring from Will makes her voice stumble and stutter. “T-they asked Father to witness,” Abigail gathers herself up then with a big breath and steels herself to speak plainly, as necessary. She knows what Will is planning, and is pretty sure they both know of the damning conclusion.

“Mr. Mason is planning on killing him. Mayor Purnell...everyone wants this over with Will.”

Will looks down at the floor with trepidation. He knows Abigail can guess as to where his panic and distress is coming from. He cannot free Hannibal if they decide to end this now. He wonders what exactly made this shift in Mr. Mason. From what he sees, Mr. Mason likes to torture Hannibal slowly. Hannibal's screams the day before made Will assume Mr. Mason simply came up with another worse torture, more painful. Could it be Mr. Mason simply snapped? Knowing that he cannot break a great being such as Hannibal, did he lash out and

cause a stir? Is Mr. Mason finally at his limit? Will can think of no other explanation. Panic now centers on the plans and excitement of freeing Hannibal being blown to the wind because Mr. Mason lost his temper. Will scrunches his face up, fists clench at his sides in anger, frustration, and irritation.

To come so far, to be through so much. Can nothing go right for him and Hannibal?

No, Will cannot let it. He cannot falter now. He will go through it till the very end.

When Will looks up again at Abigail, she is relieved to see that the panic has ebbed in Will's eyes. Looks of unspoken conversation swap between them. When word is spoken, the voices are soft and whispered.

“When?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“Then tonight.”

“But the-” whispered anxiety.

“I have no choice. I won't lose him now.”

Determination.

“Is he-...is he worth-?”

“Yes.”

Stern.

Finality.

Abigail sighs, eyes downcast. She chose to tell Will what she overheard. She chose to know what Will might do as a result, and although she feels no regret she can feel that this night will change everything forever. This is the point of no return for Will...and her.

“Will you help me?” Will asks again. His tone is neither pleading nor accusatory. He will try and free Hannibal tonight with or without Abigail's help. But with her help would be pointedly better. He does not ask again or push the issue, his best friend has a right to reject him once again. But looking at her pained face, he hopes not.

Nor is he disappointed.

Neither make any remarks about what has changed, nor why or to what capacity. Abigail simply nods, and even Will is surprised by the complete sigh of relief that he is not alone in this after all his struggle. He grabs Abigail and embraces her tightly. This is a big request, and for once he has a true ally. Abgiail welcomes the embrace and hugs back just as tightly. Almost reminding herself of the gratitude and reward of being loyal. When they part Will is rushed and eager to move quickly.

Holding Abigail by the shoulders he says “Meet me at the edge of Mr. Mason's property tonight, a little after the moon is at quarter. It's completely shadowy then, and people relax. The guards will anyway, even if they are excited that this is the last night. They might assume, and we can use that.” Will barely breathes enough to get the words out.

Abigail understands enough and nods. She needs to trust in Will's plan now.

“Okay.”

Will does not speak another word. Probably a little rudely and assuming, he unhands Abigail and not looking back rushes off. Plans and thoughts going over and over in his head of what he needs to do, and what part Abigail can play to best effect.

Abigail stays where she is a little shaken by Will's sudden departure, watching again his retreating figure. But there is no real need for him to stay. Hannibal is all Will thinks about now. Hannibal needs Will most. Even though Abigail can try and understand, she still cannot stop the uncomfortable knot of sadness in her chest and throat, nor the slight jealousy. She was all Will had once upon a time, just the two unusual ones of the village. Abigail can only hope that once Will frees Hannibal back to the wood all will go right again.

A childish hope of naivete and optimism. But we remind ourselves that Abigail is still a child.

Which is probably why she does not see nor notice the sneaky hidden figure that slips away as Abigail trudges off back home, steeling herself to not gain her families notice or attention in order to sneak out tonight. The figure hid behind some boxes when the two stopped to talk, and put two and two together from what is heard. Will and Abigail are planning to free the creature tonight, before it's death at dawn. The figure has much to think about as they dart away.

***

Despite his anxiety and overwhelming pressure of the event that is yet to happen that night, Will tries to act as normal as possible when sitting to dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Crawford that evening. Meaning to say, he does not pretend to act at all. Being used to their adopted son's somewhat strange mood swings, they take his sullen and moody behaviour with the usual grace and acceptance. Slightly concerned nonetheless Mrs. Crawford does her best to include Will in their conversations, but soon realizes that Will does not want to talk, and instead keeps looking outside the window. Tutting at him over his barely touched food, she sends him off to bed early, Mr. Crawford silently scolding Will over his boy ways. But then, boys will be boys, and Will is without a doubt stranger than most.

Feeling only slightly guilty at taking advantage of the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, he hugs Winston tight on his bed. He does not sleep at all, but instead buries in Winston's soft fur, stroking it gently in an attempt to calm himself. The murmured and soft tones of Mrs.

Crawford and gruff Mr. Crawford pleasant background noise he also finds comforting. They are no doubt speaking again about him, and coming up with new ways to try and pull him from his morose moods. As Will watches the evening colors out his window turn from the vibra

nt purples, oranges, and reds of sunset, to the deep indigo's, and blues of night falling, his thoughts turn strangely to the idea of leaving with Hannibal back to Wold Trap Wood. Such an idea is preposterous to the extreme and yet, Will can't help but consider it. It is easy enough to imagine. Will is no stranger to the wood and knows how to take care of himself. Thanks also to the extra lessons from Mr. Hobbs, knows how better to hunt and fend. He will be with Hannibal too. Will smiles in amusement as he considers Hannibal now showing him how to do things, and what things are to be seen deep in the wood where no other has ventured. For such secrets deep in the wood are for the animals of the wood, and not the people here. Will can picture the two of them now. Will now dressed in ragged cloth and leaves, standing proud next to Hannibal as great hunters of the wood. They will never be apart and they will never have to feel alone again. It is such a wondrous though that it almost brings tears to Wills' eyes and a yearning that surprises even him. He knows without a doubt in some way that Hannibal wishes for this future design for them both too.

Yet reality and sorrow soon thrusts itself into Will heart, making him whimper in pain and sudden cold. Will knows this beautiful future cannot be. For Will still has ties to this village and its people. Strange ties that can be both a chained curse, and comfort. He will miss Abigail, Jimmy, Molly, Mrs Katz, and of course the loving Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, yet that is not wholly the reason for this decision that Will knows he must make to stay. Will knows the village would care not for his absence, he is already an outcast. But the strike to their honor that a creature such as Hannibal would dare to take one of their own, would have the village hunt down Hannibal to the point of insanity. Certainly Mr. Mason would be at its head. The idea of a village mob hurting Hannibal again like the first time, of cruelly and maliciously killing and ripping him to pieces burns at Will's soul, and painfully tears at his insides like his stomach is revolting. Will is willing to sacrifice, and do anything to keep that from happening. For Hannibal's fate to be like that of the beautiful white Wendigo. Hannibal is still weak, and needs the bounty hidden in the depths of the wood to recover. Therefore Will must stay. Plus, if he were to stay he alone would be privy to any attempts to go after Hannibal. He could play the spy and sabotage any future activities of Mr. Mason and his village. So, for the sake of Hannibal, Will must stay, and let go of the only true friend he has ever known.

The heartbreak of this decision is not easy to bear.

So just once,

just so he does not falter at the point of no return later. Will lets the sorrow of the coming goodbye overcome him, and weeps out his heart softly into Winston's fur, gripping tightly. Winston knows not what has upset his master so badly, he only knows to snuggle closer, and stay exactly where he is.

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Soon enough time moves forward in the night, and the village is quiet in dark bliss and peace. Night sounds echo gently, and Will slips from his bed and dresses quickly. Using the snorts and snores of Mr. Crawford as a cover to hide any excess noise, Will silently leaves the cottage, Winston following at his heels.

He follows the familiar path to Mr. Mason's, just outside the fence line at the edge of the tree line. He hopes that he will not have to face Randall on one of his stalks. Will is certain that with Hannibal to be executed early tomorrow, and the high number of irritatingly astute village guards around the cabin where Hannibal was being kept, Randall would feel safe with his habitats security, and would turn in for a good nights sleep to sneak out and watch a great Wendigo's demise. Francis too.

In a way, Will does not care if he gets caught trying to free Hannibal. But logically, the later he is to get caught, the higher chance Hannibal has to escape safely. Will knows he is still but a boy yet, and not a big boy at that but wiry and gangling, and the villagers have weapons. He would not be able to defend both the overly large and very weak Hannibal as well as himself, should a confrontation happen. The villagers are also unlikely to use the dogs again, having faith in the silver weapons of Mr. Mason's.

So sneaky Will is what needs to happen. He still has his uncertainties and angst about how to get all the villagers away from the cabin, and move Hannibal through safely. But he will try, and to hell with them all if he gets caught. Will is willing to go to the depths of hell if that is the cost of freeing Hannibal. He hopes Abigail does come to help him. She knows the village almost as well as him, and an extra set of eyes as look out will not go amiss.

He leaves Winston at Mr. Hobb's tool shed as he picks up what he needs. As loyal as Winston is, it is better to leave him here for now.

He is relieved more than he will admit a loud when he reaches the meeting point and finds Abigail already, there crouched down in a dark blue dress and anxiously looking around, wringing her hands.

Dark blue camouflage....smart.

Will himself, is dressed in his rattiest dark brown clothes. He is a little cold, but hopes that will keep him awake and alert. His bag filled with tools and bits and pieces, swinging with silent thumps against his thigh. Moving up to Abigail, he crouches and surveys the scene before him.

It is worse than he thought. Village guards are posted all around the cabin as well as some patrolling around in a circle. The firelight from the open door of the stable shows men's silhouettes moving and talking in quiet rambunctiousness. Long torches have been stuck into the ground at various points lighting up the area much to Will's vexation. It will be hard to sneak up anywhere near close enough to do much. Will heaves a big sigh and turns back to Abigail, who is also looking at the scene with trepidation and if Will isn't mistaken, an already defeated hopelessness.

“You're here.” Will states softly, shadows flickering across both their faces and bodies like dancing black cloth.

Abigail shoots him and irritated look. “I said I would help you didn't I?” she states harshly. Her expression changes somewhat as she surveys the scene before them once again.

“Though I'm wondering if that was a mistake.”

Will looks back to the cabin. Hannibal inside, and oh so close but so far. His face is placid, voice even, showing nothing of the swelling turmoil inside him.

“Most likely.”

Abigail's eyes flicker back to him in a quick glance, before yet again resting on the illuminated scene.

“I've been here for a bit, and they never leave. Always the same amount of guards, always the same movement. More in the old stable, I think they have some sort of rations there for the night. There is no way to sneak up with all the light either.”

Abigail bites her lip before giving Will a very nervous look.

Will knows what she is thinking. She wants him to let it go. The scene before them impossible, and the whole thing ludicrous. But Will cannot give up. Hannibal's life depends on him. He will not let him down. If Hannibal were to die, Will knows something inside of him will die as well. So connected they are to each other, conjoined somewhat. Imagination or no Will can almost feel Hannibal inside waiting anxiously, aware of the added movement of the men outside but still waiting for Will to come to him.

Will will not let him down.

Will looks to Abigail and he knows his face is determined. Abigail gives a big sigh. She gestures to the obstacles before them. “Do you have a plan?”

“We need a diversion.” Will states plainly.

Abigail gives a blink.

“That's it?!?” she makes a sound of frustration and her face shows her incredulity.

Will glances at her annoyed. He knows how bad it sounds.

“I had a plan Abigail!” he hisses, “I was planning very carefully how to escape, what I would need to do and how to go about it silently! But Mr. Mason put a stop to that. He just couldn't stop! His greed and bloodthirsty ways. He isn't a holy man at all.” Will quietly spits that last part. Abigail stares at him, but cannot disagree.

Will takes a deep breath and expels out all his frustrations over the scenario now completely out of his control. He knows he needs a clear and focused head now more than ever if he

wishes to get Hannibal freed. They are wasting precious time crouched down here in the cold of night.

“I need to make enough of a diversion to get them all away and have a clear way to get to Hannibal and out. From there I know a good route to get to my spot on The Wall. I can get him through. I have the tools to free Hannibal as well once we get inside the cabin. I just need a diversion that's all!”

“Oh, that's all is it?”

Another voice neither Abigail's nor Will's has them spin around with lightening fear and adrenaline. If they stopped to think for a moment they would realize that the voice is very recognizable. But fear of being caught can often make one blind, deaf, and dumb.

They both spin and comically fall of their butts to the dirt ground, right in front of the wry and smirking face of Jimmy.

Jimmy rolls his eyes at the both of them and snorts.

“Yeah, this is exactly the look of two great thinkers and conspirators on a daring mission.”

“Jimmy-!”

“Jimmy how did you know we were here! Were you followed? What do you think you're doing?!”

Jimmy turns to Will with a somewhat sad and hurt look, mixed with indignation.

“You think you know someone....I'm not stupid you know! You think you could continue hiding something from me! I'm your friend Will! All these years! I knew something was up with you, but like a friend I waited, and kept by you until I thought you would tell me on your own. But you never did! I thought not saying anything would be better, but I guess not. Now you think I'm an idiot and not worth telling!...”

Will feels the guilt build up inside him. On one hand, he does not see why he should have told Jimmy anything, his secret with Hannibal is just that. Only an accidental discovery from Abigail included her in the first place. But on the other hand, maybe going about it completely alone was the wrong solution.

Jimmy continues to rant and scold. “But no! You didn't tell stupid Jimmy... who took your side in fights...and stuck by your moody rude ways! You told mad hunter Abigail...

“Hey-!”

“.....because of course Jimmy only knows how to have fun...hunter Abigail would know how to do all sorts of creepy ways! I heard you you know! You weren't not suspicious at all! Yesterday! I was there and followed and know, and I think this is stupid in all out ways and if Brian was here--”

“Does Brian know?” Will interjects immediately with fear. Though he is worried about Jimmy obviously finding out, it is clear that if Jimmy were to out him then he would have already. Brian on the other hand, Will knows would have told everyone immediately, if only to spite Will.

Jealousy is a mean and ugly thing.

“No.” Jimmy says, head down, “I didn't tell him and managed to sneak out. I wouldn't tell. I wouldn't...” The last words are a whisper and spoken eye to eye, and Will feels a growing swell of complete gratitude towards a friend he did not even realize was so good to him. Will shakes himself and vows to make it up to Jimmy later.

“I'm sorry we didn't tell you Jimmy.” Abigail's soft voice sounded.

Jimmy grumbles again under his breath. “It's fine Abigail. It's him I'm a little more angry about.” Jimmy shoots a pointed look to Will, but the latter is not paying attention anymore. Will can feel time moving forward.

“Alright. We don't have anymore time,” Will says. “We need a diversion to get the villagers away from the cabin so I can sneak inside and free Hannibal-”

“Hannibal? Who the hell is Hannibal?” Jimmy interrupts confused. “ I thought this whole thing was about Will trying to free that murderous monster in there, which I hope doesn't decide to turn around and kill everyone in the village once it's free, mainly yours truly. I mean I don't agree with whatever Mr. Mason is doing to it in there, making a creature suffer, but it's still a creature of nature and..” Abigail sighs and makes a shush movement at Jimmy.

“Hannibal is the Wendigo Jimmy.”

Jimmy looks to Abigail, then Will, back and forth as if Abigail had just told him that his mother never wanted to bake again.

“You named it?! It's no wonder you got attached, and just because I said I didn't tell doesn't mean I'm going to help you!”

Will opened his mouth to state that if Jimmy were not going to help he would not be here, when the lights seemed to go on in Jimmy's head.

“Wait...if you named it then. Oh the fates preserve us all! Its true! You've been meeting with it!!!” Jimmy's voice goes shrill.

“Shhhhhh!!!!”

“Shhhhh!!!”

Both Will and Abigail hush Jimmy's louder tone. Chastised but not silent, Jimmy continues. “You are the most crazy, insane, mad, deluded....”

Will lets Jimmy curse him out for a bit to let out some steam, but soon holds a hand up to silent his friend. He really needs to move on, and he needs both Abigail and Jimmy focused.

He looks between the two and addresses the both of them.

“Look, here is the deal. Hannibal is not a mindless fiend like Mr. Mason and everyone thinks. Yes, he is a killer. But only to hunt! He is a hunter like all of us. He only attacked us because there was another, a sibling or child I think she was. She was beautiful, and we destroyed her. It's my fault she was there. I tried to befriend her. Hannibal was angry, but now he is dying. Mr. Mason is slowly killing him and I need to get him out! I speak to him.” Will's voice then goes soft remembering the past visits with Hannibal and how they both enjoyed each other company.

Jimmy and Abigail watch the almost sweet, golden expression on Will's face that they have never before seen with their friend. It both startles and worries them, the almost manic intensity of it. But to Will, it is pure bliss. He turns to them trying to make the only two people he has with him understand.

“He won't hurt you, at least as long as he knows you are with me. He is smart an wonderful, and- and he's hurting and in pain, and - please-....he's my friend.” Will beseeches both of them, with tears despite himself, welling in his eyes.

Jimmy and Abigail both turn to look at each other, understanding and mutual agreement in a solid and sure glance, before turning back to Will.

“What do you need us to do?” Jimmy asks.

Will turns back to the guarded cabin. “The only problem is the guards, there are twice as many now than before which I haven't even thought possible. I just need a distraction to get them away from the cabin while I get in and get Hannibal out. Any ideas?”

They all turn to the cabin in silent thought.

“We need a big enough distraction to lure most of the guards away enough for time to run across the field. But not too bad as to make the whole Verger household get up and cause a scene, and make all the mindless sheep following villagers move all over here and block the path.” Will reasoned. Abigail and Jimmy both make agreed noises.

“The only thing that I can think of is to set something on fire.” Jimmy says.

Abigail nods her head and so does Will.

“A fire can be small or big, its a serious thing but it happens and everyone here knows how to fight a fire. Plus, with what it looks like is all the big men of the village here, there's a less likely chance that anyone still in the village will bother coming over unless the big alarm bell in rung.” Abigail adds.

The village big alarm bell sits on top of a small tower structure in the village center, surrounded by a fountain where most of the village children like to sit and play around. Will and friends often go there for a while after school. At times of great danger someone will climb up the ladder of the tower and strike the big gong bell loudly. Will only vaguely remembers hearing it on the night he first came face to face with Hannibal.

“But what do we set on fire?” Will asks, a little exasperated now. “That's the part that always gets me stuck. To set a fire and be able to sneak out without getting trapped is difficult. Add that to the fact of me escaping with Hannibal across the field unseen is almost impossible, and that's just with two villagers guarding. There's at least ten here now.”

But at that Abigail simply turns to Will with an excited look on her face. “But Will, that plan is with just you! There are three of us now! Me and Jimmy. One of us can set a fire while the other can help you with Hannibal and be a look out at the same time.”

Will acquiesces to this despite his reservations. More villagers obviously means more help is needed for his rescue.

“So,” Jimmy claps his hands and rubs them together quietly with a gleeful and wide grin of mischief on his face. “What are we burning?”

They look back at the scene.

“The stable where the others are?” Jimmy suggests.

“That might be too dangerous!” Abigail counters. “Plus with more villagers there, they might be too quick in putting out a fire. There are too many too, to be safe enough to create a big one.”

“Okay, okay.” Jimmy accepts, putting his hands up.

“Mr. Mason's house?” Will suggests with dark look on his face.

Lets see how you like it when someone ruins something you care for, you heartless monster. Will thinks to himself. Abigail simply makes an annoyed noise from here throat.

“Don't be stupid Will” she scolds. “The same thing can happen. Plus,” she adds in an undertone “some of the villagers might drag their feet a little in helping.”

True.

Mr. Mason is a man of extravagance, and loved flaunting his entitlements to the not poor, but lower socioeconomic people of the village. Although most accept this as the way it goes, Mr. Mason being a man of high importance. Some still feel the indignant sting of pride, and envy can arise from Mr. Mason's lack of humility. Having a bit of that materialistic pride burnt away might please some folk.

“What about one of the other stables then?” Will says. “A few are close enough that the villagers might willingly move to help, but far enough to get enough of them away.”

“Sounds good.” Jimmy agrees.

“But what one?” Abigail asks.

Will points to one of the suitable stables that houses the families horses.

“That one.”

Abigail hesitates. “What about the horses?”.

“We can unlock the stalls before we set the fire.” Will explains, “When the horses smell the smoke they'll run out and help cause more havoc. I doubt they will run towards where Hannibal is in the cabin.” Will knows instinctively that the farm animals would smell Hannibal and recognize the apex predator inside.

Abigail hesitates again.

“What?”

“Spit it out.” adds Jimmy

“Why don't we set the one next to it?” she tentatively suggests. Both boys look towards the noticeably bigger structure next to the horse stable.

“One of the pig stables?” Jimmy asks, pulling a face.

“Yes.” Abigail confirms brightly.

“Why that one Abie?” Will asks curious.

Abigail's face turns a little sad. “Mother likes to gossip and talk around. She told me that Mr. Mason doesn't really care for the horses as much. She overheard Mrs. Margot mentioning it to Mrs. Purnell while they were doing deals with beekeeper Old Mam Pimms. Mrs. Margot told Mrs. Purnell that the horses were really her beloved creatures, not Mr. Mason's. Mr. Mason only puts up with them because they can turn a profit in horse flesh, and it keeps Mrs. Margot at home more. Mum said Mrs. Margot sells the old or sick horses to Mr. Cordell for horse meat, but would never agree to sell any of Mr. Mason's beloved pigs, even though Mr. Codell has asked about them more than once.” Abigail's face turns disgusted then, a familiar reaction when Mr. Mason is being talked about. Will recalls how Mrs. Margot looked at the meeting days and days ago. Such a sweet and soft spoken woman, but always so solemn. Rarely seen, Will feels great sympathy towards her for being stuck with such a horrid husband.

“But why not the pigs?” Will asks. “If they are in such good care they could turn out a great profit.”

Abigail turns even more sick in the face. “He breeds them special.....pigs...well Miss. Alana mentioned something and I asked father about it. Pigs... well they can be carnivorous right? Well its a rumor, but father said they can be specially trained to eat people.”

Will feels aghast of the thought that Mr. Mason would purposely breed pigs to eat people. There are predators, Will knows, Hannibal being proof of that. But Mr. Mason is a true monster to turn on his own kind. Jimmy looks sickly green in the face of Abgail's revelation.

“So,” Will states decisively, “We set fire to the pig pen.” Will still plans on unlocking the pens first, it's never the animals fault for being born as they are. But if they are too scared to

run free....well, Will won't be too heartbroken. Plus an added benefit might be Mr. Mason being too distracted by the danger apparent to his beloved pigs, to worry about a very heavily caged Hannibal.

Will takes out a a few dry twigs, paper, and a small lighting stick. They can use the many torches placed about to light the paper and twigs closer to the pig stable so the will not be seen. He hands the twigs to Jimmy with a nod, but furrows his brow when Jimmy makes no move to take them.

“Jimmy!” Will hisses “We have to go now.”

“I know!” Jimmy hisses back “But, but I think it would be better if Abigail went to set the fire.”

“What?!” Abigail turns alarmed. “Why me? We've already planned my help with Will. You've just, crashed in.” Abigail crosses her arms in a pout. “You light the fire!” In truth,

Abigail has been yearning to see this Wendigo that has Will so enamored.

Will feels his head ache in frustration. There is just no time anymore!

“Jimmy!”

“Just- just listen Will.” Jimmy holds his hands up in seriousness. “ Abigail is better at sneaking and hunting. She can slip by and remain unseen much better than I can. We all know I can be rather clumsy,” Jimmy's cheeks flush red, “ We shouldn't risk it, not when we only have one shot. The only reason I was able to sneak up on you before was because you were distracted, but these men are on watch. It'll be better.”

Will can see the logic of it.

“Plus,” Jimmy continues, “I can help Will with the Wendigo better than you can anyway. From what I've heard, its a really big creature, and Will told us that it won't be able to help. I can help Will....carry it... better than you can.”

This time it was Abigail's turn to flush red. Jimmy turns to Will with a mock glare. “You DID promise it won't try and eat me or anything.”

Will gives a small smile “Just try not to put anything close to his mouth, just in case.”

“Oh, great” Jimmy says drily with an eye roll.

“Okay.” Will hands the fire set tools towards Abgail who takes them, abet still a little disgruntled. Will takes sympathy on her and guesses why she is still miffed.

“Once you light the fire, hide and stay there and watch for us to come out. Once we are out and you see us reach the edge here and we haven't been seen, follow us at a distance and make sure no stragglers catch us accidentally. You can be our second watch. I've already told you the route. Swing by and pick up Winston, I've left him at the tool shed. He will listen to you, and you know most of his commands. he might be able to help you create a distraction if

need be.” Will places a hand gently on her shoulder. “If all goes well, you can meet Hannibal right before he goes through The Wall. I want you to be able to meet him.”

Abigail smiles at Will, feeling better now about the new plan. She clutches her instruments to her chest and without another word or indication, quickly moves around their hiding spot and slips silently across the field of grass, moving low and steady, using the natural shadows dancing along to help hide her.

“Abigail!” Jimmy reacts, reaching out in vain to try and grab her back.

“Leave it Jimmy.” Will says, secretly pleased at Abigail's sudden start. They might have been crouched there forever discussing the intricacies of the plan as time went by. Will looks to Jimmy and nods his head. Jimmy swallows loudly and takes a deep breath before nodding back.

It is time.

Both boys move as silently and as quickly as possible towards the cabin where Hannibal resides. It is risky, moving across the open fields using very little cover to hide them.

But Will will not risk staying back and not being close enough when the time comes to get inside the cabin. Will might have the tools to use, but there is no way of knowing how quick he can get them off under stress of the moment.

Every part of his body is filled with adrenaline. His limbs feel heavy yet light at the same time, muscles taunt with tension. His ears are roaring with the air going by him as he moves. He can hear with loud clarity his heavy breath. His vision sharpens, almost as if the world around him has now taken on a glossy filter, dark blue nights with stars that twinkle. Every sound is a risk, every move and turn of the village guards as they sneak closer and closer to the cabin, an alarming siren call. The only thing that is going through

Will's mind is a continuing mantra.

Do not see us... do not see us....do not see us... do not see us.....

They reach a broken closed fence almost two thirds of the way nearer to the cabin and hide behind an old horse trough. Will only feels a little bit relieved to make it this far. He remembers not having felt this nervous since the very first time he came here to try and visit Hannibal. Taking deep breaths, he turns to Jimmy. Realizing with shock that not once since he started moving did he think about the other boy following. Jimmy is taking heavy breaths beside him. His face is a pale white in the moonlight, but he turns towards Will with a weak and shaky smile. Will smiles back, then crouches outwards around the trough a little. He only just manages to locate Abigail still moving towards the pig pen, and is glad to see she is almost there. Jimmy is right in that regard. Any worry he has about Abigail getting caught vanishes.

Abigail the sneaky huntress.

“Wow, look at her go.” Jimmy whispers in admiration, peeking around Will. Will gives a soft huff of humor, then both boys sit back, and huddle together behind the horse trough.

“Now, we wait.” Will says.

Very cliché.

The wait does not last long.

Soon, Will can smell smoke in the air being gently buffeted over by the night winds. A rustle and the sounds of snorting and distressed sporadic squeals of animals, or better yet in this case, Mr. Mason's pigs. It seems to rip through the otherwise tranquil night sounds, and for one moment, Will can almost taste the sudden still alarm of the village guards as they all turn towards the arising danger. The smell of smoke and burning starts to choke the air all around. Will, at that moment swears he can feel the heat of it billowing out, or maybe it is only his imagination as he is this far away. Then again, maybe not.

Fire is catching, burning, and absolute. One of natures most obliterating elements.

Will peeks back around the trough and can see in stark contrast to the dark blues and blacks of the night, the flickering tongues of red and orange from the pig stable as it starts to burn. The village guards have identified the threat and start to move from their lazy guard stupor. Calls and shouts are made in booming panic. The lights in the house are blinking on one by one. Will can picture the house maids and servants looking out the windows sleepily, then wide eyed as they see whats happening. Adrenaline up and racing as the house awakens. A self satisfied smirk crosses Will's face as he imagines Mr. Mason's irritation at the noise disturbing his slumber, then the anger and fright when he realizes the source. Mr. Mason has his own small lake on his property, as well as a well, so finding a source of water to help put out the fire will not be a problem. But it will take time. Will looks again at the stable which is now most definitely on fire. The squeals of the pigs in distress causes Will slight pangs of guilt, but the panic and yelling of men now surrounding the fire and the noticeable screams of an enraged Mr. Mason coming out of the house in his velvet brocade dressing robe, makes Will giggle with glee. He exchanges similar smiles of glee with Jimmy beside him, a faint red yellow glow from the distant fire lighting up their faces.

“Hah!” Jimmy breathes happily.

But they cannot tally for long. Will does not even have time to check for Abigail, he will simply have to trust that she is safe and watching from a distance.

She did her part.

Will moves swiftly out from behind the trough and closer to the cabin where Hannibal resides. He can feel Jimmy following close behind. The fire works like a treat. As Will makes his way across the grass, shadows of the night easily hide him, even if anyone were looking at where he is. For what is one more moving shadow to the many others that envelop the night, when there is the threat of lit fire close by?

Still, Will's head and eyes are watchful as an owl hunting prey, head whipping back and forth, anxiously searching wide eyed for any risk of being seen. Adrenaline fills him almost to brimming the closer he gets, and he can feel his hands start to tremble. From what he can guess, all the men who were loitering in the stable have moved to the burning pig pen. As Will moves closer he can see that some of the guards to the cabin have run off to help douse the fire as well to his relief. For one fleeting second he believes that there may be no guards at all left, but such wishful thinking is naive, and a short second later two guards come from around the back of the cabin to stand by the door. Though both watch the happenings of the burning stable with camaraderie.

Will curses under his breath, but he is not surprised.

Oh well.

He moves forward with purpose now, a bit faster, in hope to reach the next hiding point. A small indentation in the earth overgrown by long grass not far from the cabin. Not big enough for an adult to hide convincingly, but for two small children, perfect. So determined to reach his point, he does not see the villager who has broken away from the ruckus, and is running almost straight for them. His destination, the village beyond. With a message of what is happening at Mr. Mason's property. Fear spikes through Will, seizing his throat and chest. The night air, so fresh and clean a while ago feels like your now breathing in broken glass. There is nowhere for Will and Jimmy to hide. As the heavy breathing of the running villager grows closer. Will can think of no other option.

“Get down!” He hisses back at Jimmy, then flattens himself completely into the grassy ground.

Head down, breathing in cold dirt, he does not dare move, barely breathes, and closes his eyes in a fugal attempt to appear invisible. His ears strain to pick up any sound of the villager going by, or evidence of them being seen. Heart thumping, the villager does not notice the two boys lying on the ground less than 5 meters from him. His job is to get word to the village, and people generally do not see what they do not expect will be there.

Will does not want to move but he cannot afford to wait too long. Gingerly raising his head, he waits only a breath more before whispering back to Jimmy.

“Come on.”

Seeing Jimmy's rapid but barely moving head nodding, the two boys this time crawl forward, hidden in the grass. They flatten and hide still twice more when it looks like the two remaining guards at the cabin are looking there way, but make it to the long grass groove without too much issue. Hiding huddled once more they both exchange grins of triumph at their feat for a few seconds, breathing heavy with adrenaline, arms around each others backs.

After a few breaths Will spies through the long grass squinting slightly in the night, despite the bright glares of the torches, or maybe because of it against the dark. Twin gates of hell framing the place where a monster lies inside. But there is hell outside too, and the whole area once wholly dark and shadowy, shines orange, black, and almost gold from fire. In a way, it is as if the world inside the cabin where he is with Hannibal has suddenly burst forth

outside and magnified. The flashes illuminating the night. For is it not only when light is brought in then the dark may reveal its secrets? Its monsters? Surveying around, the pig pen is now completely consumed and devoured by orange and red flames that lick upwards to the night sky, flickering like snake tongues. Heat rolls through the cold of night and the sounds of shouting and panic echo across. To Will's amusement, Mr. Mason's shrieking voice can be heard sometimes above the din, as he attempts to order the villagers to put out the fire 'better' than they already are. To make matters worse, snorting and panicked pigs are running amok, and the villagers have to contend with trying to wrangle them together and herd them to another pen. The husky sour and sharp smell of smoke teases the nose and makes Will want to sneeze, but he dares not.

Poking his head through the grass slightly, the two village guards left are still distracted watching the stable fire. Will is happy to see the tall arrogant figure of Boyle and the slightly hunching figure of Peter. Of all the guards there could be, Will knows them the best. He notices that some of the torches have either been taken or blown out around the cabin creating black spots which will surely help. He turns back to Jimmy who is watching with the disturbing glee of a fire addict, the panic of the stable fire. Will clears his throat softly, and Jimmy jumps slightly before sheepishly turning his focus back to Will.

“So what's the plan?” Jimmy whispers. Will inclines his head towards the cabin. “ Boyle and Peter are left.”

Jimmy snorts. “Even we could bully Peter into turning the other cheek. Boyle however...”

“I know.” Will agrees with a soft grunt. “Boyle we will have to deal with completely. We can't afford to sneak in and then have to deal with him as we are trying to run away. He'll cause alarm and that will get messy.”

The two boys consider how best to deal with Boyle.

“We could both go up when they are separated and knock each of them out with a big rock?” Jimmy suggests. Watching the two older men, they have not moved from their spot together at the door, and Will knows that neither him nor Jimmy are fast enough to go undetected and take out both of them at the same time.

“We'll leave that as the last resort.” Will says drily. Jimmy just shrugs, and scrunches his face in deep thought.

Possibilities and ideas are whispered in hushed voices and rejected. There just is not any authority and power two boys can have.

Time ticks by slowly, and with every second the stable fire grows bigger which fills Will with dread. Not because of the risk of the fire itself, but because once the stable is burnt down there will be no more distraction, and Will will have failed. To add more stress, no doubt the village would have gotten the message of the fire at Mr. Mason's, and there is still no guarantee that villagers might not at any moment arrive to the property anyway to either offer concern and aid, or for simple curiosity. The latter being more probable.
Time by a heartless mistress that can cause men to fall to their knees is despair.

At this thought, Will's mind goes static and abruptly all he can hear is a buzzing noise while panic grips him making it almost impossible to think. Suddenly its hard to breath, his saliva sour and thick, and he only just manages to realize that Jimmy has been softly muttering and cursing under his breath.

“What?” Will asks suddenly.

“Well,” Jimmy whispers more clearly, “I was just thinking that it's a shame that we do not have any food or drink that we could use to distract them or something. If I knew I would've had to try and remove two full grown men tonight, I would've made sure to have stolen some of Old Mam Pimms sleeping powder beforehand!” Jimmy's voice holds all the exasperated sarcasm Will feels.

Nevertheless, the reasoning is sound, and Will rustles as quietly as he can into the contents of his pack. Unfortunately it is only filled with tools, all of which he needs....no...wait!

Will pulls out half way, a small skin container full of water. How could he have forgotten such a thing! He brought it just in case Hannibal needs a drink before escaping. Will grimaces in regret that Hannibal might have to do without. But a drink will be no good to Hannibal if Will is unable to even get him out of the cabin. Jimmy spies the skin, and grins. “We have a distraction!” he excitedly breaths.

Will agrees, but is still unsatisfied, a small skin will not be enough to convince Boyle of any goodwill. Especially if it is said to be for more than one man which makes more sense. Will then spies some larger rocks on the ground and Jimmy's clothes. Slowly an idea forms and he looks to Jimmy with a determinedly evil grin. Jimmy look wary.

“What?” he says uneasily.

But soon enough, small parts of Jimmy's shirt are cut away and convincingly wrapped around three rocks making it look like three small packages. Long grass is used to tie the material in place.

“I'm going freeze!” Jimmy whines.

“No your not..”

“Why didn't we rip some of your clothes!”

“Stop being a baby”

“You owe me a new shirt!”

“I'll buy you two.”

Though Will suspects that Mrs. Katz would replace the shirt anyway. A young boy accidentally ripping his shirt is nothing new to even roll your eyes about.

Well, maybe roll your eyes at least.

Be that as it may, Jimmy's complaining falls of deaf ears. As the two boys look at the 'meal' package before them, an awkward silence befalls them at it's implications.

One boy will have to distract Boyle and Peter while the other frees Hannibal, and it is clear that Jimmy will not be able to do the latter.

Neither boy likes this plan, but with the noise from the fire clearly calming a little, they have run out of time. Will cannot help but express token concern.

“Will you be alright? I mean you might get caught.”

Jimmy looks at him drolly. “Don't think I can't see through that false concern.”

Jimmy narrows his eyes and Will squirms a little. Jimmy smiles warmly at the squirm. “I'll be fine Will. This is a good plan. I can at least get Boyle away, and the most you can sneak up and knock Peter out. Or better yet, just give him one of your scowling faces, that can skin a sheep.” Jimmy receives a mock glare for his cheek. “You can get the Wendigo out, and then don't forget you still have Abigail out there somewhere. She can help you like you guys first planned. If anything happens I'm sure you two can handle it.” Jimmy continues.

Will places a hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

“Thank you.”

Jimmy snorts. “Thank me again after this is all done.”

Jimmy takes a deep breath and gathers his 'meal'.

“Walk quick, but don't run.” Will instructs, one hand on Jimmy's shoulder. “Make it look like you are heading towards the stable where the extra villagers where. Say you are on strict instructions from your mother to go there with the treats for all of the villagers. I know Boyle. He will want first pick.” Will squeezes his shoulder gently, then lets go.

Jimmy nods in understanding then with another deep breath, while Boyle and Peter are still distracted, obviously not very good guards, runs at a crouch back to the horse trough. Once there, Jimmy stands up and proceeds past the cabin and to the stable as if just sent from the village.

Will can do nothing but wait yet again for his moment to move into action. Quietly holding his breath. He spies Jimmy walking at a brisk pace close enough to the cabin but not far enough to rise suspicion that his route is not clearly to the stable close by. As deduced, Boyle notices the young boy and calls out, grabbing a nearby torch and pointing.

“Oi!, what are you doin' boy! What you got there!”

Boyle's voice is slightly sneering and nasal as always, and Will cringes just hearing it. He watches as Jimmy stops and acknowledges the man.

“I'm just taking some food and drink from mother for the men fighting the fire. We got the message and mother thought the men could use some sweet after guarding that...thing, and

savin' Mr. Mason's house and all."

Boyle steadily walks towards Jimmy and stops before the boy, looking up and down and considering the package and the skin.

"Food and drink you say?" Boyle sneers.

"Yes." Jimmy confirms, a slight wariness to his voice now.

"Well give it here," says Boyle reaching out.

"No!" Jimmy says, taking a step back and the goodies out of reach.

"Oi!" Boyle says angrily. "You said it was for the men guarding, and I'm one of them! So hand it over!" Boyle snatches out again.

"No!" Jimmy cries, taking another step back and holding the packages to his chest in defiance. "You'll just eat it all and they'll be nothing left! Mother said they were for the brave men fighting the fire and saving Mr. Mason's pigs! Not lazy men like you who are just standing around doing nothing!"

At this Boyle's face seems to balloon and even though you cannot see in surety from the dark night and the fading orange glow, Will can assume that Boyle's face is turning bright red with rage.

"You snarky little bastard! You give it here!!"

Boyle lurches forward to grab not the goodies this time but Jimmy himself, brandishing the torch in his hand at the boy. To Will's admiration Jimmy does not seem to stall or miss a beat being toe to toe with an angry Boyle. With quick steps Jimmy prances out of the way, and sticks out his tongue, blowing a raspberry at the enraged man.

Mischievousness in every part of his manner Jimmy taunts, "If you want any! You'll have to come fight for it like all the rest!" before laughing and darting off towards the stable.

Boyle spills out angry curses at the boy brandishing the torch to Jimmy's echoing laughter. Turning back to look at his companion who has reservedly watched the whole thing,

He turns again and glares as the annoying child is almost at his destination. Turning back to Peter he considers the cabin he is supposed to guard. He decides that they cabin and the creature inside is safe enough. He knows Mr. Mason keeps it in chains and a cage. There is no risk here. Besides, he wants to catch that disrespectful little shit and give him the beating he deserves.

"Stay here!" He growls at Peter before storming off towards where Jimmy went, grumbling about disgusting little children the entire while. Peter opens his mouth and makes an involuntary noise and move forward of protest, but resigns himself almost immediately after. Sullen, he glances about, nervously wringing his hands and anxiously waits by the door, hoping that Boyle will return soon and they won't get caught not at their post. Boyle will certainly place the blame on him somehow.

Hiding and watching in the grass, Will applauds his friend's performance, making a silent promise to give Jimmy more consideration and credit in the future. But he cannot ponder. Jimmy won't be able to keep Boyle occupied for long. Will gathers his bag with him and slowly slinks around and forward. Helped along is the fact that Peter is constantly looking back to where Boyle has gone, and is not paying attention to the left side of the cabin where Will is moving towards. It is clear that Peter won't move from near the door, so Will makes the split second decision to try and knock Peter out.

Will feels a slight pang of regret at this. Peter is one of the kinder adults in the village, and Will knows what it like to be bullied for being different. But unfortunately, Will's desire is greater than his guilt. Sneaking forward as silent as he can be, being careful to not move his bag too much and have the tools clink inside, he is about to pick up a medium sized rock before he hesitates and picks up a sturdy looking stick instead. He does not want to seriously harm Peter....just knock him out for a bit. Neither does he want to give the man even more head damage.

Not that being knocked out might not, but still.

Will moves forward, wincing at every slight crack of broken leaves and small sticks beneath his feet. He can hear both his own silent breath and thumping heart, and Peters low anxious noises and much louder breathing. If Peter turns around now, Will cannot hide.

Slowly.....slowly...slowly....

Now!

Darting forward, Will only views the startled and alarmed half turned face of Peter who's human instincts have finally told him there is something behind him, before he gives a sharp kick to the back of Peters knee to bring him down to Will's level. The older man crumples down on one knee, almost as if he is in prayer. But the sharp cry of pain that goes with it tells otherwise. With no more thought, and with blood almost singing through his veins at the power he now wields, Will swings the stick to the side of Peters head with a woody smack. The poor man collapses down with a whimper, arms and legs awkwardly placed, face down. Will's ears are ringing, and for a moment he cannot move from his position, hands holding his stick around and up above his shoulder like a modern day baseball player.

Not that Will would know that reference of course. But boys have been hitting things with sticks since the dawn of time.

He breaths heavy before very slowly lowering the stick, ready to hit again should Peter still prove conscience. But the man does not move.

Will finally drops his stick and in a display of sympathy, rolls the man over with a small grunt so he is not lying on his face. Looking up and around, no one has heard Will's assault. Ears and eyes catching, he notices a small ruckus going on at the stable where Jimmy and Boyle should be. Flickering of shadows and echos of a man's yelling can be heard on the wind. Will worries for a moment until he hears the familiar answering sound of Jimmy's mocking laughter. He breaths a sigh of relief and hopes Jimmy does not get into too much trouble, but he cannot dawdle. Looking over at the burning pig pen, the fire is still burning

strong, but Will can see the building is nothing but smoldering black on the ground. The villagers mostly are milling around trying to stay out of the way of a still shrieking Mr. Mason, who is flapping his arms about in anger like a flustered and embroidered chicken.

Will must move. He almost face plants into the door is his haste, banging into it loudly. He knows this lock intimately, and it takes no time at all to unlock it. He does not bother to hide it's unlocked state this time. No need. Opening it wide he almost throws himself inside, but does not forget to pull it shut again behind him just in case. He hears a jangle and a thunk as the opened padlock falls to the dirt floor from the activity, smells the now rank and acrid scent in the cabin, much worse than ever before.

And yet, inside, it feels the same as any other night he may visit.

The golden glow from the single oil lamp light shines across his eyes as they adjust, a pendulum sheen in the dark room. This is where Will enters a place all of his own.

Well...their own.

As the pendulum settles on dancing shadows of fire and night. Will spies Hannibal in its center, as tall and black and majestic as always. The sight of his dearest friend fills Will to the brim with warmth and butterflies. But the longer he focuses, the more warped the vision goes. Hannibal is sitting up as best as he can, but the nasty wounds on his body are weeping blood, clear, and black liquid. Hannibal himself is as weak as ever, and looks shrunken and broken. His once beautiful skin has a slight grey tinge to it, and if it were ever possible, his body is thinner than ever. Skin gripping sharply to his bones, lines and wrinkles around his beautiful eyes. Even so, Hannibal holds a look of both slight alarm and curiosity, and happy surprise at seeing Will shows bright, his voice almost purring.

My little one...What is going on outside?

Will grins from ear to ear before moving forward and gripping the bars of the cage with both hands.

“It's alright Hannibal,” Will says “It's happen' t-night. I'm goin'.... t-get you out. You're goin' back to the wood. You're goin' to be free soon.”

Will is breathless with exuberance, barely forming complete sentences as he steps back and frantically rattles around in his bag for the correct tools to unlock the locked cage.

The cabin is still rather dark and despite the lamp light, he can only find the tools by touch. He is happy to see that Hannibal does not seem too constrained inside, by any of the elaborate chain designs of torture that Mr. Mason has done previously. That would take valuable time to figure out how to break. Hannibal is simply chained by both wrists and legs, as well as from the usual metal collar around his throat. Grabbing the necessary metal, he begins his attack on the various locks.

Hannibal watches Will attentively.

“Mr. Mason plans to kill you tomorrow morning.” Will says, tongue poking through between his teeth and words in determination.

“There was a mob, the villagers, they don't like it when things are happening right in front of their noses. They heard you in pain and panicked. They couldn't handle it anymore.

The disturbance from their oh so peaceful, mediocre....lives.” Will spits.

Hannibal gives a rumble of displeasure.

“Yeah.” Will snorts in agreement.

One lock breaks free and thumps heavily, rattling to the ground.

Three to go.

“They're all pathetic.” Will continues...

“Ow.”

He accidentally cuts his hand as the tool he is using slips and scraps. Frustration furrows his brow, but he disregards his pain giving his hand an immediate shake, the cut a quick suck to dispense of the welling blood before continuing. Hannibal makes small moan of concern, head lifting at the smell of blood which both alarms and makes his mouth water. But he would never harm his precious one.

Well, maybe a little lick to sooth both him and Will.

Will lifts his head for only a moment to reassure Hannibal with a quick smile that he is okay. As he is continues at the locks, arms and hands gripping and pulling, pushing, he registers the strange hungry look in Hannibal's eyes. He feels a flicker of fear in his chest but pays it no heed, using instead his nervousness to angrily attack the tricky second lock. He cannot falter now that he is at the point of no return. The sounds of metal on metal are grating, but every sharp sound, click, and heavy snap builds the excitement in both Will and Hannibal.

The Wendigo regards his precious little one in front of him. He can still hear the disturbances outside, smell even through the wood the acrid smell of smoke. At the appearance of Will, he already assumes the purpose of this visit. He remembers the excitement and sparking eyes as Will spoke previously of his plans. So intelligent is his little one. His aura now, a beautiful mirage of sparks and crackles. Hannibal too, can almost taste his freedom now.

Snap. Thump. Rattle.

Two to go.

More cuts and scraps bloom in sharp red lines on Will's hands. The large and powerful tools still awkwardly grasped when used with smaller hands.

The third lock is a little easy, just a simple crossing of over locking chains linked together.

One to go.

Will makes sure to keep his ear out for the noises outside. The far away echoes of men. A sudden collective rise in noise makes him glance up towards the boarded window. He cannot realistically see but he can clearly imagine the sound was due to the pig stable finally collapsing to the ground. It's black burnt and ashy wood crumbling to the dirt it once was. Returning to the earth.

Will must hurry.

Finally with a wrench and gasp of exertion, the last of the locks falls to the ground. Will smiles, feeling powerful and strong from his success, breathing heavy. Hannibal too purrs in high pitch congratulations.

Will stands, leaving the tools on the ground and stops, a mere step away from the cage.

He looks to Hannibal as the enormity of their shifting situation now takes place. Will will have to enter the cage. In all of their previous interactions there was always the cage between them. An unwanted and hateful barrier. But now.....

Will's nerves reach almost breaking point, eyes wide as he looks at Hannibal before him. His Wendigo and dearest friend. He knows in his heart that Hannibal would never hurt him, yet just like moments ago, Will cannot help the anxious fear as it mixes with his excitement. Sour bile fills his mouth, his lungs feels like a rock in his chest, his head filled with white noise. So much more than he has ever felt before.

Then he realizes that Hannibal is still purring.

The purrs are soft, and rumble up and down in pitch and tenor. Soothing and rich. Will focuses not on the great creature before him, standing chained but great, and instead focuses on Hannbal's face. Stoic and expressionless as always, features chiseled like stone, it is Hannibal's eyes that draw him. Somehow despite the white, frosty caverns in shadows thanks to the dark of the cabin, they draw and suck Will in.

The feeling of falling into an abyss that is almost.....warm.

Inside the depths Will sees glimmers of color like a fire opal he once saw on one of Mrs. Bedelia's extravagant necklaces. So beautiful.

Hannibal continues in his soothing purring, a small lullaby to his little one before him. He does not want Will to ever be afraid of him. While fear can taste delightfully tart and mouth watering on his prey, in Will it tastes bitter and unwelcome. Neither does Hannibal blame Will for his response, though he is still a little irritated by it. Hannibal reasons that he is after all, an apex predator. Even weakened as he is, and Will is still small with much growth to go. Yet to realize his proper place in the hierarchy of the world. But Hannibal will teach him. He will gladly protect and show Will his potential, all the dark and secret places that others fear to go, they will both thrive. For Hannibal is in no doubt that when he is finally free, Will will come with him. His happiness at this thought showing through his sound.

Will's very soul pulls him forward, and with trembling hands he opens the cage and steps inside.

The final barrier broken. By Will's own hands.

The first thing Will senses is the chill.

Funny how he has never really noticed it before now.

A strange afterthought never truly dwelt on until this moment. This close. The chill crawls along Will's skin creating goosebumps, it slightly stings his nostrils like metal. No, not quite like metal, that is the scent of blood. Mixing with the chill like a winter hunt. Logically, no doubt from Hannibal's wounds. Hannibal, as if sensing the enormity of this moment right now, stands as tall as he can get in chain and cage, his lullaby an echo of forgotten sound. Will looks up and up towards the might of Hannibal. Inside Will's head he pictures Wolf Trap Wood in the winter snow, bright and outlined by the dark of the spindly trees, and in his mind, the echoing sound of a wolf at howl. Will often dreams of the wood like this in his sleep. But never when awake, and never did the wolfs howl be answered by the moaning call of a creature of blood and snow. Yet Will is not afraid. In his mind, he moves silently through the wood not sure where he is going but knowing there is something there waiting, always waiting for him. In a dark cave, hidden deep in the wood. Around him there is the fresh light of magic and anyone would want to linger. But for Will, his goal is in that cave. Deep in that cave where something...no... someone is waiting for him....in the abyss...red eyes looking back in the black.....

This is where you belong little one.

Outside, another rising noise of men breaks Will of his daydream with a shock of purpose and a thumping pain in his head, Will pulls himself out of his own mind, blinking rapidly. He was staring into Hannibal's eyes the entire time. Lost in the two white pools, almost like his imaginings. But the sounds of reality come swooshing back into his ears and Will ashamed of forgetting his true purpose here. Yet, deep inside he is shaken to his core.

What exactly was all that before? A daydream? A vision?

Hannibal too, is shaken by the moment. He too saw his in his head his homeland in the wood. The secret place he wanted to share with Will. Somehow, their very souls and minds combined, and for one moment, he and his little one where one in the same.

Blurred and merged together. Their aura the deep color of the winter rainbow.

Hannibal makes deep cry noise and crouches down onto his haunches so Will may reach all his chains. Will nods to himself, and moves forward. Fear and all reserve forgotten. He takes Hannibal's big clawed hand in both his and inspects the lock before fumbling in his bag for the right tool. Hannibal's hand feels smooth in its obsidian skin, but much too thin and fragile. Will can feel every bone and vein. Nicked and worn away, up so close he is surprised to see the skin underneath is black too, but raw with rubbed wounds, and blistered as the very metal burns the Wendigo. What alarms Will most is Hannibal's temperature, for although the

strange chill is still emitting from Hannibal's very pores, his skin no longer feels cool like before, but lukewarm. Feverish almost, Will guesses.

Will tries to unlock the locks instead of breaking them like he did to the cage ones. Will does not want to risk hurting Hannibal accidentally with the large awkward tools. Neither does he want to simply break the chain and leave the burning metal around Hannibal's skin. He focuses all his attention on the locks, trying his best to ignore the growing awareness of Hannibal's towering figure above him, face looking down at the top of Will's head. Still,

Will's neck hairs stand on end.

Will tries to be as gentle as possible, but Hannibal's rumbled whimpers suggest otherwise, and Will winces each time. Finally the lock breaks open, and flinging it away to the opposite side of the cage, Will immediately lurches to Hannibal's other hand to unlock the other.

“It's okay Hannibal. Not long now. Not long now. It's okay. Not long now...” Will only half realizes his murmurings, almost like a mantra, over and over as metal scraps and clangs.

Hannibal makes reassuring noises to Will as he gently rotates and moves his other now freed hand. He makes half moves towards Will's head as if he wishes to touch and stroke like always, but the frustration and anxiety pouring from Will stays him. Hannibal instead makes do with licking his wrists and wounds, the taste and burn of his tongue soothing.

A final clang and grate and the other hand is free. Will steps back a moment, taking a deep breath.

“Okay. Next the feet.”

Will crouches down to the floor and is amazed once again at Hannibal's strange feet. Long, yet stocky and narrow, there is no webbing between the toes, instead the claws don't look like claws so much as hard hooves. Will doubts he could ever describe it to someone correctly what he is seeing. Giving himself another shake and scold for being sidetracked again, he puts fear into himself wondering just how much time has already passed. He reaches forward and huffs a laugh and smile as Hannibal stretches his foot out towards Will a little to help with reach.

“Thanks.” Will says glancing up, with a quick grin.

Hannibal makes a pleased noise in acknowledgement before proceeding to lick the wounds on his other wrist.

Clang.

One to go.

Will does not think anything past the moment. Trying to unlock the last chain on Hannibal's foot. He does not even acknowledge Hannibal's foot in front of him except in care, so he does not hurt the flesh beneath the metal. His hands are burning something fierce from the strain

and tiredness of using too many big tools, probably the wrong way. But they are a means to and end, and nothing more.

Clang.

It is done.

Will almost stumbles on his feet backwards. His bag of tools forgotten on the floor, he drops with another clang the tool he was using. Breathing heavily he gazes with wide eyes as Hannibal's flash and swirl, slowly reddening. The entire body of the Wendigo seems to ripple and churn, not much unlike the growing rumbling of the fire mountains told in stories. The power and devastation moving monstrous underneath. Hannibal flexes each of his muscles, tilts his head from one side to the other. The growling noises rising and falling without fail. Will can feel power almost like a viscous heat in front of him. Which is strange, as Hannibal is currently giving off cold like winter itself. Goosebumps rise on Will's skin, and in both fear and awe he backs out of the cage, hitting the metal sides with his arms in haste. Stopping two large leaps away from the cage entrance. He can taste Hannibal's excitement on the back of his heavy breathing tongue as the Wendigo finally squeezes through his cage, his entrapment, and with a low roar stands fully and stretches out as far as he can in the cabin. Completely glorified in his escape and freedom. Eyes glowing red, obsidian body glistening, his wounds trickling red rivulets of dark blood only adding to his tremendous aura. His antlers, even slightly broken touch the cabin roof and shadow over the floor and walls like multiple dark knives. The single lamplight in the cabin further emphasizes the Wendigo's presence, outlining Hannibal in burnished gold.

Will does not move from his spot, completely breathless as he finally sees, his eyes finally open fully to the true nature of his friend, his dear Wendigo. To whom he has bonded with so closely the past couple of months.

This is a god, and Will feels the overwhelming urge to fall to his knees in front of him. But Will is not the same child anymore as when they first met, sprawled on the dirt ground that soaking up the blood of his dead father. Will has come a long way. Most of that journey linked to the creature in front of him. Their friendship and bond cemented now.

Hannibal is unaware of this as he continues to roar and stretch, flexing every muscle and bone, feeling them snap and pop. Red eyes flashing hellfire. He is overwhelmed and the vengeful blood in his body boils within. He is free now, and there is no stopping him. The pain of his wounds only fueling his radiance. He is of the great woods. He is the dark, the cold, and the hunger. He will rip apart his enemies, the pathetic pink fleshed vermin inch by inch. Leave the disgusting man pig in pieces for daring to try and imprison him so.

Gorge on hot bloody innards and crunch on the bones. Tear. Rip. Shred. Feed. Kill.....

“Hannibal?” A soft low voice breaks through his enraged state like sun through a red fog, a voice tentative and unsure, but strong. A voice Hannibal would know anywhere and only now realizes has the capacity to bring him to his knees. He looks down to see his beloved little one gazing up at him with a mixture of both awe and the slight tang of fear.

Oh, how could the Wendigo have forgotten so quickly? It is only due to his dear one before him that he is free, that Hannibal knows his name and stands even taller than all others. Will's aura shines bright as always and this close Hannibal can truly breath in all that Will is, with nothing between them.

Hannibal's demeanor immediately softens and the harsh growling roar dies away to be replaced by a loud and echoing purr that Will is intimately familiar with. Hannibal's rage is not lost or diminished, but controlled and carefully placed aside, easily picked up in a second. All others deserve to see his wrath. But not Will. Although Hannibal does not restrict himself or attempt to make himself seem small and less in front of Will, there is no need to hide any of him. His manner and every twitch and move turning almost playful, and inviting.

Well, as much as an over 7 foot high Wendigo creature with sharp claws, teeth, and towering antlers can seem playful and happy.

But Will is always able to understand Hannibal without human language and voice, and answers Hannibal's manner with a big smiles of his own.

“Hannibal.”

This time, the name is said on a cherished whisper and with no fear, as the two join in their shared mutual happiness at Hannibal's freedom. Will feels tears well up in his eyes, and chest ache in joy at seeing Hannibal for what he should be once again. Will cannot stop his hand from immediately lifting up and reaching out in front of him.

“Hannibal.”

The name is said with question, and challenge. Will almost daring the Wendigo to bridge the gap between them. It was Will who first reached out to the Wendigo in start. Overcame all obstacles to first see him, then return, and now free him. Will wishes to complete it. But Hannibal must reach out now in return.

There is no hesitation.

Hannibal lifts a clawed hand and slides cold fingers through the much smaller hand before him. Hands and fingers link familiarly, and with comfort. Hannibal's purr rises and falls in tune, and although his face is expressionless, his eyes melt back from the red only to start shining an almost silver. A laugh escapes in delight from Will's heart and he uses the power in Hannibal's arm to pull himself forward towards the Wendigo. Slowly and with curious murmuring, Will slides his hand from Hannibal's and traces Hannibal's body, every strange bone structure, makes sympathetic noises at each wound, and skims the obsidian skin. Hannibal allows this curiosity with patient fondness, doing the same in kind to Will, claws moving up to tangles and stroke Will's strange fur, silky and long. Always a source of enjoyment. He strokes Will's head continuously, his other hand coming up to prick with care at Will's strange second skin which covers Will's warm flesh. Will's face as he looks high up into Hannibal's is lit up from within, his aura shining, and a big smile from ear to ear. Will is amused to find that as he steps closer, he only comes up to the Wendigo's concave stomach.

It matter not who moves first, or both at the same time.

But soon, Hannibal finds himself squatting down, and Will moves comfortably forward into Hannibal's body. Thin but strong and solid before him, long arms pulling him in, and wrapping around. Will's arms in front of him, hands flat on skin and bone, allowing himself to be enveloped.

The two beings embrace each other for the first time. For the both of them, the warmth that is birthed between them is nothing that can compare.

They are together, and that is all that can be.

The boy and the Wendigo.

But of course this would not be the story it is, if it ended so soon and as such.

Reality art thou a heartless.....

“HEY! I've been waiting for.....WOAH!”

Jimmy bursts into the cabin with all the grace of charging ram, flinging the unlocked door open and skidding on the wood. The only reason for staying upright is his one handed grip on the door frame. Out of breath and with a panicked look on his face.

One glance at Hannibal, at the infamous Wendigo before him freezes him stiff. Eyes wide and if possible would pop completely from his sockets.

“Wiiillll?!” Jimmy drawls out in alarm. To the fun loving boy, it looks almost as if the Wendigo is crushing his friend.

“Are you okay? What's happening?” Jimmy narrows his eyes at the scene before him.

So this is the legendary Wendigo of nightmares? Seeing the monster before him, Jimmy cannot argue that it is indeed a monstrous being. Shock freezing Jimmy in place, he cannot help but notice that Will is almost looking, well, if Jimmy is courageous enough to say, unbelievably content. Circled in the large monsters arms. This is the friend that sure enough is a little weird, but a friend Jimmy has known all his life. The surprise at Jimmy's presence, but ease and peace on Will's face creates for one guilty and terrible moment, a jolt of fear tremble through Jimmy. For one painful torturous moment, Will looks as foreign to him as the large clawed monster that stands in front of them both.

After escaping the wrath of Boyle, who all too soon found out Jimmy's trick with the food, walks back along the path to the village, before ducking back and hiding in the dip he and Will were previously. Will has given him instructions to not go after him into the cabin with the Wendigo, under reason that the creature might become startled.
Jimmy obeys only under the fear of being eaten.

But too much time goes by, and as Jimmy see's the villagers disperse and the once flaming stable down to ash, urgency grips him and he passes poor Peter's still prone form to warn his friend that time has run out.
Which brings us back to the current predicament in the cabin.

Hannibal gives a rumble of threatening displeasure at the sudden appearance of another of the rude man pigs, taking a step forward in malice. The only thing stopping him from attacking is the fact that although he does not want to admit it, Hannibal is weak and in pain from his long time spent being tortured and caged. Plus this man pig is but little. Another little one like his own, and only smells of fear. A warning may suffice in keeping this new threat away. Meanwhile, Jimmy makes a unbecoming squeak of fear before ducking half out the cabin door, hiding behind the frame. Will, frustrated and annoyed, as this is why he told Jimmy to stay outside, moves himself between his friend and Hannibal, attempting to calm the looming Wendigo.

“It's alright Hannibal, Jimmy is a friend, he's helping us.”

Will places his hands on the Wendigo's chest to make sure that Hannibal does not move forward. Then moves his hands to Hannibal's forearms, stroking the skin soothingly, his voice pleading and as soft as he can make it.

“Shhhh...it's fine, he's with me....It's fine, he's my friend too! He helped us....I'm going to get you out remember?...I promised...I promise.” Will lifts his head to meet Hannibal's milky eyes as they dip down to meet his, softening at the voice and feel of his little one in front of him. Will smiles up and the bond between them once again glows softly.

“Will!!” Jimmy hisses at them.

Both eyes turn to regard Jimmy, and the boy cannot help but shrink back again. Darting a look between them both, but reassured that Will will not let the creature hurt him.

“We have to go!” Jimmy whispers loudly. The boy looks behind him and around the cabin before turning back with panic in his eyes. “We're out of time! The fire is done and the villagers will come back! We have to go now!”

Will jolts himself back to the present and scolds himself for forgetting their time limit. Though no regret fills him at all over his and Hannibal's shared moment. But they have to move.

“Come on Hannibal.”

Will moves around to Hannibal's right side and as much as he is able attempts to help the Wendigo move forward. Hannibal's legs are unsteady and probably cramping from disuse. Hannibal takes two rumbling steps forwards before stumbling to a halt.

“Jimmy!”

The other boy whines and bounces up and down rapidly before rolling his eyes and with a deep grown moves forward to help on Hannibal's other side, gingerly touching the Wendigo who is still lightly growling in warning.

“If he eats me, I'm going to come back and haunt you big time!”

Will rolls his eyes. “He won't eat you! You're too chatty, probably stringy too.”

Jimmy sticks his tongue out at Will, but the banter helps him forget exactly what he is touching right now. With difficultly they make it through the door by turning sideways and letting go of Hannibal as the much larger being is forced to crawl through.

Grabbing the Wendigo again they are forced to a halt at the sound of a groan from the ground.

Peter stodgily awakens, holding his head and propping himself onto his knees before looking up. At the sight before him of the monstrous Wendigo, free from the cabin and holding onto two children, a warbled cry of alarm escapes the older mans lips.

“Shhhh!! Peter!”

“Shut up!”

But the older man is frantic, and white eyed now with fear, he scrambles back wards with one shaking hand out in front of him, his cries of alarm getting louder with every breath.

Hannibal growls and moves forward, driven to eliminate this threat. For this is not a little one, and the Wendigo recognizes the face of one of the man pigs of his capture. But Will once again leaps forward and stops the Wendigo.

“It's just Peter, it's fine Hannibal!”

Jimmy takes initiative as Will struggles this time to halt the Wendigo. Spying the rock Will previously discarded, he darts forward bending to grab it before swiftly moving around the crying man and just as swiftly, knocks him hard about the head.

Poor Peter, once again is knocked unconscious to the ground.

“Poor man is gonna have a pained head tomorrow.” Jimmy comments drily, looking down.

“I'll send him to Mrs. Crawford later.” Will whispers, adding in urgency “But we need to go!” Will has both arms wrapped around Hannibal's waist in both hindrance and support.

Jimmy looks back to Mr. Mason's property and spies a small group of the villagers making their way back to the stable base.

There are still men back at the burnt out pig pen, attempting to corral the pigs while Mr. Mason yells angrily. Jimmy is thankful for once of Mr . Mason's dramatics that have bought them precious time. But the noise from the villagers is quieting down as the threat of fire is over. Jimmy nods back to Will and drops the rock. Taking up Hannibal's other side gingerly the Wendigo, assured by the behavior of the other little one that there is no threat, ceases his growling as they slowly make their way cautiously along the edge of the field.

A small allowance both boys are grateful for.

For different reasons.

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Two boys and a Wendigo are a strange site, moving and stumbling awkwardly across the edge of the fields. Anxiously craning their necks around to look behind them at the property of Mr. Mason. Imagining every second a yell of awareness as they are spotted. But reality is often much more of a let down. As the noises of human living slowly drain away to be replaced by the quiet of a sleeping village at night, the only thing they can hear is their own heartbeat, loud with exertion in their ears. Their labored and panting breaths seem particularly loud, and to Will, are as loud as the big gonging bell at the holy place where Mr. Mason likes to preach.

Hannibal is heavy for the two of them, and three times their height. The ground below becomes uncomfortably hard, if that is ever possible. Their adrenaline is ebbing away as they continue in their journey, making it much harder to keep placing one step in front of the other. Sweat chills them down to the bones. The crisp night air, once a comforting relief, feels like miniature knives dripping down to stab at the eyes. But they cannot let go of Hannibal, and after a while it is not clear on who exactly is supporting who.

Will catches the faint scent of iron in the air, and a glance left reveals that Hannibal's wounds are weeping, some split open again from movement. For a second Will is worried but a glance up reassures him. Even wounded and weak, the open air is already doing wonders for the Wendigo. The moonlight as the Wendigo looks up, is reflected back into milky eyes until its like Hannibal's very eyes are two moons itself. His obsidian body almost glowing.

Sometime during the distance walking Hannibal starts to make long moaning noises, but Will recognizes it as a soothing noise of pleasure, and cannot help the short and subconscious happy sound that escapes his lips. So pleased that Hannibal is free and clearly starting to thrive even in this short time. At the sound Hannibal looks down at his little one, head with its mighty antlers cock to the side and Will can imagine Hannibal smiling. A short burst of laughter escapes Will's throat, answered at once by a small rise in moan.

Poor Jimmy, not aware of the unique language shared between the other two, feels his anxieties spike.

“I'm glad you two seem to be conversing all happy like over there.” Jimmy spits. “We'll just all have a leisurely stroll while trying to free a creature of legend through a many peopled village at night and not get caught, and you can all laugh.” Jimmy continues to grumble under his breath about crazy people and creatures, and something about thinking you know a guy.

Hearing the slight hostility, Hannibal's moan changes to a low growl, making Jimmy start a little away from the Wendigo. But to his credit, the skittish boy does not let go of the large arm, with an attached equally large clawed hand from around his little shoulders. Will's irritation from Jimmy's outburst soon changes to a stab of guilt. He can sense that Jimmy is clearly out of his element helping Will here, and his friend is starting to unravel. Will knows any move to sooth will only makes things worse, so he instead squeezes the black skinned flesh under his hand, thumb stroking Hannibal in an attempt to sooth him instead.

Thankfully Hannibal stops growling.

“I thought I said not to go into the cabin after me.” Will remarks tonelessly.

Jimmy shoots Will a glare.

“Well, excuse me, but you were taking your sweet time!” Jimmy's voice is breathlessly sarcastic. “I waited but you never came out. Forgive me for worrying that you were having trouble breaking this thing out.” At that, Hannibal growls.

Thing!?!

Will pats black skin once again, soothing. A small smile at the indignant tone he senses from Hannibal's voice. ‘Thing' is one of the words Will taught Hannibal early in their conversing. Ignoring Jimmy's comment he asks “How did you escape Boyle? Were you caught?”

Jimmy smirks at the memory. “Yeah, he got me. He was pissed when he figured out our trick. Lucky for me, Boyle is a lazy shit. He thought I was simply being nosy, trying to get in on all the action. With the other villager's coming back he did not want to be caught not at his post. After calling me every name enough to make you cringe, he cuffed me about the head and let me go under threat to tell me mother on me come morning. I hid back in the dip to wait for you, but you were taking too long. Boyle would've come back as soon as the other villagers looked like they were returning.”

“Hmmm...” was all Will said in response.

Jimmy opened his mouth to make a scathing comment on Will's lack of gratitude, but the dark structures of the village soon appear before them, and both boys concentrate on maneuvering through.

Following the path Will planned previously, the only threat came from the poultry making panicked noises as they passed. The dogs were smarter, and merely whined at the sight and smell of the Wendigo. Carts, crates, and flowerbeds became overwhelmingly annoying obstacles. Hannibal's growls needed to be silenced quickly by Will, who does not want any of the villagers sleeping occupants to awaken at the strange noise. Poultry and dog calls do not alarm, but Will recognizes that Hannibal's noises are different from those the village is used to. It is probably what helped them escape Mr. Mason's property so easily.

If one does not expect to see something, the less chance one will.

Strange...

Will smiles again at Hannibal's voice. Hannibal is a predator himself and understands the art of stalking and silently moving on prey. But there is no prey here, and Hannibal has no care for the possessions of men. But Will knows they must not be caught. Mr. Mason and the others still have the silver weapons, and Hannibal is still weak. He cannot face down a whole village while right in the middle of it as it were.

I do not like this sneaking.

Will only smiles and pats Hannibal's arm.

Finally realising that they are only a short way from his spot on The Wall, he allows himself a small spurt of triumph. As he looks to Jimmy, even the other boy grins back at him.

Wait....

Somethings different.

A small detail unrealized and unnoticed until now forms icy dread in Will's veins.

The sky was a lot darker a moment ago.

As Will looks up he can spy the telltale signs of light blue on the edges of the sky.

Daybreak.

The quiet of the village is now soothing rather than deep, and if Will strains hard he can hear an echo of birds awakening. Hiking up Hannibal's arms, and his torso as much as he can, he turns to Jimmy.

“We need to go.”

He watches as Jimmy looks up and alarm fills his face as awareness shakes him like it has Will. Exchanging a nod, the trio shift forward quickly in an attempt to outrun the dawn.

As they reach The Wall, colors of white and lilac form the under edge of the sky. A threatening blooming red skimming. Somewhere in the village, roosters throaty calls break the soothing quiet. Will can imagine clearly the bakers and shopkeepers slowly stirring, and arising sleepy eyed and rumpled from their beds. Hannibal, excited at the prospect of being soon returned to his place in the wood, makes a loud ringing roar of happiness.

“SHHH!!!” Will implores him. “Hannibal you must be quiet still!”

I feel the call of the woods.

Will smiles and presses his hand flat on the Wendigo's chest. “I know Hannibal. But we can't let them hear you now, you must be quiet.” Hannibal growls and grumbles, but after a few soft roars, quietens.

“Will!” Jimmy hisses “We have to do this now! Quick! Go! Go! Go!”

Reluctantly wrenching himself from Hannibal's side, Will moves to the spot and with only a quick twist of the nail, removes the great wooden plank covering. The large plank is light but awkward. However, unlike the other times, Will is not worried about being caught. Shoving the large piece of wood away from him, he scrapes the tip of his nose for his troubles.

Underneath is the wired fencing with the tough plant ties that Will prepared earlier, and he throws himself into undoing each one, revealing the gaping hole to the beautiful Wolf Trap Wood on the other side.

Will feels panicked and pressured to move and undo the ties as quick as possible. For some reason this makes his fingers fumble. Stress and anxiety zapping his strength so the ties that seem so simple to untwist suddenly feel like the most complex puzzle.

Beside him, Jimmy keeps whispering “Quick, quick quick!” which does not help.

Behind him, Hannibal is growling in anticipation. The twists are taking forever to untie and untwist and Will bemoans his lack of foresight in leaving the bag of tools behind him at the cabin. No doubt he could have found a tool to help him cut the simple but tough plant hide. Will is only half way down before Hannibal stands upwards from his crouch observing Will, and sniffs the air. He can smell the faint scent of another, but not his beloved little one and not the scent of the strange new one that Will is friendly to. This one gives of the rank sour smell of fear, combined with a sickly sweet smell, not unlike the vile man pig that hurt him in the cabin.

Will hears the change in Hannibal's voice from a growl to a threatening rumble of threat.

Someone is coming.

Dread fills Will as he turns around in a panic. He is only half way! He cannot be caught now, not now when he is oh so close to freeing Hannibal.

“Will!” Jimmy hisses once more, “What are you doing?! You have to move! Wha-”

“I knew it.”

The voice that comes from behind one of the barrels sitting next to one of the village huts is snide and oily.

But familiar.

Jimmy's jaw drops open in complete shock and surprise as he turns towards the voice of his brother.

Brian.

Brian is smirking horribly at the two of them. A cat that ate a canary, or so they say. Even so, he keeps an eye on the Wendigo with scared beady eyes.

Hannibal, sensing that this other little one is an unwelcome foe and not friend, is angered by the negative aura this new intrusion invokes in his little one. So with a snarl of anger lurches forward at the slightly trembling Brian.

Brian falls on his butt in fear, whimpering and scrambling back, eyes wide. Only Wills' quick reflexes save him as he leaps forward and grasps one of Hannibal's arms, clinging and hindering the Wendigo's move forward.

“No Hannibal! You can't hurt him!”

The look Hannibal gives him looking down in incredulous.

You cannot stop me.

Will clings determinedly, wrestling with the larger being. Again, it is only due to Hannibal's will in not wanting to hurt his little one, that Hannibal finds it hard to detach Will from his arm.

Let go little one!

Will can tell Hannibal is very annoyed, but even though he would love to set Hannibal on Brian, for nothing better than to put the fear of all that is holy in him. He does not trust that Hannibal would stop at a scare and maybe a small scratch. Will knows Hannibal can sense that he has no love or affection for this new boy, unlike Jimmy.

And those Will is not affectionate to, are simply more man pigs that must be devoured in Hannibal's revenge.

Oh, despite finding Will, Hannibal has not forgotten his promise of revenge.

Of blood and fury.

Brian, his clear bravado at catching the other two boys in the act gone under the power and terror of facing the Wendigo, keeps scrambling back until he hits a rock, hand out warding in front of him.

“That's a monster! A monster! You're crazy! It should be dead! That thing is supposed to die!”

Hannibal gives off another raged snarl at the groveling boy before him on the ground. The latter, letting out a rather unnatural high pitched shriek. Will can only grip harder, as Hannibal drags him forward a little. Will digs his feet into the ground and hangs, using what little dead weight he has to his advantage.

“Please Hannibal. Please...”

Will hugs Hannibal's arm to him, cheek to the skin and continues to plead as Hannibal continues to snarl. Turning his head, unthinking, he places small kisses on the straining black muscled flesh before him in a last ditch effort to sooth. An act so innocent and tender both, that it stops Hannibal in his tracts. He regards his little one before him, eyes that have turned red in his anger drain back to milky softness. One clawed hand, unencumbered, slowly reaches up so delicately run through sweated brown curls. Another sweeter growl is heard layered under the first harsh graveling mellow. Will smiles at the familiar feeling of Hannibal's claws through his hair and squeezes the arm trapped between his before looking up at his dearest friend.
Their peaceful moment is almost immediately interrupted by Brian. Who looks at the scene before him with complete disgust.

Revulsion making the boy's usually comely face ugly and twisted.

“Your sick William Graham!” Brian's finger is pointed in accusation at the two who turn to face him. “Your unnatural! I knew it! I knew you were somehow linked with this creature! Your just as evil as...as...EVIL!!!”

It clear that Brian has become unhinged. Strangely enough, the only feeling that shines clear in the boys soul is envy. How can the sweet Molly be so taken with this Will and his unnaturalness? It always baffled Brian to no end. He has always been a good boy of the village, normal, strong, a good example. So why Will?!? Brian always had his suspicions at Will's 'difference' from the rest of them. His shy and misunderstood little boy act that fools even the most sweetest girl in the village. Well, if only Molly could see her precious Will now. Cuddled up to the monster. She would be terrified.

And yet, we must remember that jealousy is the ugly green eyed monster worst of all.

Will continues to grasp Hannibal's arm tight, and although Hannibal continues to growl and snarl, he no longer attempts to attack this little scavenger before him. He sees many of the like in the wood, and they are beneath him.

Jimmy, frozen in shock until now, glares at his brother before him. A slight blush of shame pinking his cheeks. He knows of Brian's ill feelings towards Will. But now it is before the whole world to see. Finally broken over his shock at Brian's appearance, he spares Will and the Wendigo a customary glance of check before storming forward to grasp his brother under the arm and haul him up angrily.

“What are you doing here Brian?!” He demands, giving his brother a shake.

Brian rips his arm free and glares. “I followed you! You think just because I'm not in on all of your secret little whispering I can't figure it out! I'm not stupid brother!” Brian regards them all with a sneer. “I had a feeling something was going on so, when I woke up as you tried to sneak out I followed you. You always were a clumsy one brother.”

Jimmy's blush reddens in embarrassment, ashamed now that it seems his clumsiness is what caught them out.

“So I followed you. All the way here!”

Jimmy closes his eyes and sighs in irritation.

“And what were you hoping to do Brian? Now that you've found us out? For the love of all that's holy! I know this looks bad.”

Jimmy throws his hands up in the air and spins before placing them on his hips.

“Trust me! It's been going over and over in my head a million times. But what Mr. Mason did is wrong and you know it! No creature deserves to be at his mercy. You would agree.” Jimmy's stare makes his brother squirm uncomfortably. But it is not enough to keep the swelling hate growing behind Brian's eyes once more.

“That creature is an abomination. Plus you would've had your wish! The creature is supposed to die today. It would've all been over! Instead, you all try and release it back where it can kill us again! You're all betraying your own kind!” Spittle flecks out of Brian's mouth as he yells at them. His eyes welling with emotional tears. He looks to Jimmy and whispers under his breath

“I'm ashamed to be your brother.”

Jimmy's mouth opens in shock and sadness. He thought he knew his brother, and although he knew Brian could get ahead of himself, he never thought such hatred ran so deep.

“Oh Brian...” Jimmy's face a mix of pity, sadness, and sympathy.

Brian sniffs and then gathers himself up, his chest puffing out in effort. “I never would've thought you so stupid brother. Will I expected, in fact I was willing to bet on it. I even expected to see that weird Abigail girl here with him instead.” At this point both Will and Jimmy exchange quick looks.

A vein of relief moves through them. Abigail is still out there, and if she is acting according to plan, she is watching everything. Abigail is supposed to arrive in time for Will to introduce her to the Wendigo before he leaves. It could be hopefully that Abigail is watching them now, in hiding. This is a good thing. But if she was, then why did she not warn them somehow of Brian's presence?

“Yet here you are.” Brian continues, “Following Will like a dumb puppy.”

“What did you say?” Jimmy narrows his eyes in indignant anger. Brian only smirks annoyingly again.

“You heard me.”

Jimmy moves forward with clenched fists and sneers. “So what now Brian?” he asks, voice thick with sarcasm. “You found us so what now, oh smart one!”

Brian's face flushes red, but he holds his ground. Jimmy's question on the outside is a sarcastic jibe at his brother. But Will can see underneath it. Jimmy wants to know if Brian has tattled on them. Will holds his breath in hope that Brian's bark is worse than his bite.

Beside him, Hannibal continues to growl menacingly.

Brian does not look proud when he speaks next. Perhaps his conscience sparks in his mind. But consequences care little for good intentions, and Brian has come too far to backtrack.

What is done is done.

Will does not need Brian to say the words. He knows with an awful stone feeling in his gut that Brian has betrayed them.

When Will breaths in, its shaky, and fills his lungs with broken glass. He looks up to Hannibal beside him in despair. Hannibal does not quite realize what has brought on this

change in Will's manner, and attempts to sooth on his own with one tipped claw gently to Will's soft cheek.

Jimmy however, needs to hear the confirmation.

“What did you do Brian?”

Brian squirms a little uncomfortably. He is not at all at ease with this new version of his brother.

This serious, angry brother. Only the clumsy, happy one.

“I ran off after I saw you leading that...thing out..and told Mr. Cordell.” Brian says in a deadpan voice.

“You....” Jimmy squeezes his eyes shut in pain. “He'll tell MR. MASON! Do you realize what they might do when they catch us?! Did you even think?!”

Brian's face scrunches up in equal pain. “I HAD TO! YOU LEFT ME NO CHOICE!” he screams.

“Jimmy...we need to quieten down.” Will attempts to settle the situation.

He realizes that they have been here for a while, doing nothing but making noise. He looks up to the sunrise in the sky, the beautiful pink, orange, and red colors he usually finds soothing, are now a death signal, serenaded by the morning chirping of birds. But the two brothers are far from finished. Jimmy yelling at his brother for the betrayal, and Brian desperately defending himself.

“Will is your friend! We are all friends! He could be sent away to Mr. Mason's hell place for boys! Is that what you want?!”

Jimmy's statement sends chills down Will's spine. Its a possibility that he has considered of course. Mr. Mason had tried to send him there before after his fathers death, so one can assume he would leap at the chance to attempt again. This time, Will doubts Mr. and Mrs. Crawford can stop him. Not after Will's sin, the atrocious act of freeing the Wendigo. Of betraying his kind. But they are wrong, Will thinks as he looks up again at the tall majestic face of Hannibal.

A yell of frustration breaks his thinking, and Will looks over to see that Jimmy has finally snapped. He catches the moment when Jimmy's body hits Brian and the two brothers tackle to the ground. Yells and immature fists fly, and the two continue to yell as they roll around on the dusty earth.

A distant sound catches on the edge of Will's hearing.

Men's voices, chanting and moving. The distant sound of many men indeed.

Will's breath catches and he looks to Hannibal.

The Wendigo of course, heard the approach of the men before Will did. But unlike Will, he relishes the idea of a confrontation. This time, he will not be distracted by grief and the sweet aura of his little one. Even weakened, he holds power of the likes they have not seen yet. Blood and fury. But he can feel a tugging at his side, and looks down to the panicked face of his little one. Hannibal does not understand why his little one is so distraught. Does he truly have no faith in Hannibal? Underestimating his strength? Will did not seem like he did, always a look of admiration on his face, even when Hannibal was trapped.

A 'cage' Will calls it.

“Please, Hannibal please...”

Hannibal cannot resist such a face, Will's aura spiking black and red. He reasons that his little one is simply worried about his weakened state, and it is true that attempting to face these man pigs now would risk injuring himself further. Something he would not care too much about but for his little one beside him. He cannot make this an end. Hannibal has something to live for now. So he allows Will to drag him towards the strange dead wooden trees, and watches with slight fascination as Will fiddles with the thin grey objects. Hannibal watches behind Will towards the sound of the men approaching, and occasionally glances down at the other two little ones still squabbling in the dirt.

Strange little animals.

Will struggles to rip away the ties but finds it almost impossible without anything to use to cut. The ties rub his fingers raw in places with friction, and the metal wire underneath nick him in many places too. But he cannot stop, driven forward by his very pounding heartbeat.

Faster....faster...faster....

Please break.....

Finally, and with great relief the ties fall away and Will pulls back the wire to reveal a space he can only hope is wide enough for Hannibal to squeeze through. Judging now, it might not be. But it is the only way.

Reaching out back with his hand. “Hannibal! Come on!”

A sound of pleasure from Hannibal fills Will with joy. He steps back for the Wendigo with the biggest smile ever. Joy fills him completely with sunshine. Now Hannibal will be safe.

Brian sees Will's achievement and attempts to rush forward with a yell, but is tackled back to the ground once more by Jimmy.

“Go Will!” Jimmy yells, holding tight to his brothers legs.

“Let go Jimmy!”

Will turns back to Hannibal. His eyes shining with affection for the one being in the world who would ever be his true friend.

Will can feel the bond between them. Blue eyes of shining jewel meet milky winter white. Such a bond lasts forever. Maybe once Will has escaped the consequences of his actions today, he can meet Hannibal again in Wolf Trap Wood. He knows Hannibal would never leave this area. Not after the pain by Mr. Mason, and not while Will resides here. Will knows Hannibal will continue to attack this village until Mr. Mason is dead. Although he cannot bring himself to feel bad about it or sorry. Instead he only feels such a hunt and kill would be justified.

Oh, he wishes to be there to see it.

See Hannibal in his element. Will can feel tears well and fall from his eyes. He hates having to say good bye to his beloved friend. But Hannibal must go back and heal, and Will in unsure when next he will be allowed back into the wood. His spot here will undoubtedly be fixed proper this time. Maybe he will have to find another spot.

A small purr from Hannibal thrusts Will out from the inside of his head and he realizes that he is now holding hands with the Wendigo. He marvels at the look of his small pale hands inside the long black claws, and takes a deep breath. Hannibal always smells likes the crisp woods in winter.

“Goodbye Hannibal.” Wills whispers. He yearns to throw himself into Hannibal's long arms again, to emerge himself in a cool embrace. Intimacy shared previously only making him want more of the comfort of feeling united in strength with another. Hugs from others only making him feel irritable, sticky and itchy. Mrs. Crawford's hugs are nice enough. But Hannibal makes him feel safe. Finally with a deep breath he tears his hands away from Hannibal. He can hear the growing mob of men approaching.

Their time together finally at a close, and Will's heart is breaking.

“Go Hannibal go!” Will cries, hands clasping tightly behind his back in an effort to let go.

Hannibal however, does not seem to understand. For he falters, looking with a cocked head from Will to the space, and back again. He purrs and holds a clawed hand out once more.

“No Hannibal!” Will cries again, tears flowing freely. “You have to go!”

Hannibal straightens and more firmly holds out his hand with a small growl.

Come. Little one.

Will looks back to where the voices are getting louder, blocking out the distraction of Jimmy and Brian, still wrestling on the floor.

It seems more than one frustration is being let out between the two siblings.

Hannibal growls, and Will looks back.

Come.

“No Hannibal! You have to go!” Will yells, desperately pointing to the space at The Wall, unsure and confused as to why he senses confusion from Hannibal, and reluctance to leave.

Growl. *Come.*

“Go!”

Growl. *Come.*

“Go!”

A louder more irritated growl. *COME.*

“Hannibal...” Will despairs, “You have to-...” he stops, eyes going wide as Will finally understands Hannibal's reluctance. The outstretched hand, an act so simply and clear.

Hannibal wishes Will to go with him, and Will wonders if its possible for a heart to break a second time. Is not something once shattered, incapable of shattering again? Or do the pieces come together with broken veins, awaiting the next shatter? How else can the ripping pain that cripples Will's insides be explained?

Through snot and tears, Will can only speak in a chocked whisper.

“Hannibal...I can't.”

Hannibal responds with a distressed noise Will has not heard before.

Come.

This time, the word is wavering.

It is not like Will does not want to go with Hannibal. Oh, he wishes to more than anything in the entire world. He can already picture the life both of them can lead. A life he previously toyed with the idea of. Will should not be so surprised by Hannibal's assumption that he was to go with him. But Will will not turn his back on the consequences of his actions. He is not a coward. Neither does he feel comfortable leaving Abigail and Jimmy to face the wrath of Mr. Mason alone.

And, if Will were to be completely honest. He is afraid. Afraid of the possibility of a new life. An unseen future. As hard, and lonely as life is without Hannibal, Will knows this pain, is quite intimate with its existence. The sudden choice of change for everything he knows, despite the beautiful bond between him and Hannibal, scares him.

We must remember that Will is still only a boy.

Hannibal reads Will like a book and the noise he makes is filled with desperate pain. His hand dropping slightly. This pain is worse than when his beloved little sister was taken from him. His little one, his only one, is rejecting him.
Hannibal's growl is angry. He does not understand why Will will not go with him. He makes a stalking move forward, swiping one of his large claws across Will's front, as if he can

simply swipe away at this unknown figure in front of him that's hiding his little one behind it. For the first time since they first met, Will gasps in the face of Hannibal's anger and steps back in fear, out of the range of the slashing claws.

Their beautiful, strong, shining, unbreakable bond.

Cracks.

The air between them turns stale and warped.

Neither can bring themselves to budge from their decision, but neither would ever dream of breaking their link completely.

Stalemate.

For it is fate that brought them together, and only fate can tear them apart.

The loud sounds of the village men bursting from around the houses signify that time is up. Lead by Mr. Mason and Mr. Cordell, the whole mob of men are startling to behold in their manner of a righteous hunt. All men carry a silver weapon of some kind. Mostly daggers. But Will remembers all to well the damage the silver arrow crossbow in Mr. Cordell's hands can do. They spread out around the boy and the Wendigo, calling and yelling their hate and fear, so tangent Will can touch it firmly by the hand. Every man at arms is here, even Mr. Boyle and Peter. Though the latter is trembling and clearly a little worse for wear. Someone, a tall commanding figure which Will vaguely recognizes as Mr. Katz, grabs both Brian and Jimmy who have stopped in their brawling, startled by the show of the masses, and hauls both boys up. Gripping under their arms, the commanding man shoves both boys through the line of armed men and out of sight.

Will hears a roar behind him, and looks to Hannibal. If the Wendigo was angry with Will then, he looks positively rage filled now. Rising up tall and grand. His antlers are sharp and seem like they are tearing at the very sky. Hannibal's eyes are a deep dark blood red, almost black, and glare at the row of men before him. His screaming roar causes most of the men to step back in fear.

Kill. Maim. Blood.

Will can hear Hannibal loud and clear, and helplessly places his hands over his ears to try and staunch some of the roars. He can barely breath as he looks between Hannibal and the men. One man stupidly throws a spear at Hannibal, it misses completely but the intention is very clear. A mistake on the man's part, no doubt driven by panic. Hannibal looks to the fallen spear on the ground dispassionately. With a snarl, and quick as lightening he darts forward and unlike with Will, whom even at his angriest would he never harm, his claws slash along the man's front. Blood sprays out, symphonic with the man's painful cry. He falls, bloodied and moaning as his colleagues step forward with silver tipped sharpness.

For a few seconds the world goes red and black. Hannibal is glorious in his violent fury. The men's weapons flash silver only to be broken away by large claws. Hannibal flings and tears through each opposing man, slashing and breaking. Blood flies like rain, breaking bones

heard cracking and snapping by teeth and claw as Hannibal devours bodies, and flings them aside where they land like broken dolls. He slashes at a few more, but sheer numbers fells him back. A few crossbow arrows sink into black and bloodied flesh. Will scrambles forward and grabs onto Hannibal's arm. He knows the Wendigo cannot win against so many of them. Hannibal snarls down at Will.

Let go!

The Wendigo ignores Will's pleas and shakes the boy off, shoving him to the ground. Will's chest goes tight with sorrow and pain. This is not how his beloved friend treats him. Although he does not blame Hannibal for his behavior, the cracking of their bond cripples them both. How can a plan go so very wrong? Will thinks, watching as the men step forward again in an attempt to corral the Wendigo. Hannibal has already injured so many of their own, but it looks like whole population of village men are here.

Like ants on a carcass, they swarm.

“No..no..no..no...” Will cannot help his whimpering, repeating the single word over and over. He looks behind him at the gap in The Wall. If only he can get Hannibal to go through, if only to save himself. Watching the terrifying Wendigo now, he knows it will be an almost impossible task. Hannibal is in sheer rage form, swatting at the men, bowing his head to ram and scour them with his antlers.

Kill. Bleed. Feed. Die.

Hannibal wishes them dead, and Will, with a sinking feeling knows that now is no time for his soothing and talk. Hannibal will not listen. Will watches the fight, the noise of pained and screaming men, and Hannibal's roars, blood spraying the air. His face is desolate, and he feels so helpless. Making no move to go between the two foes, his fear of being hurt by being caught in the middle makes him sink to the ground, his energy and strength zapped. He notices with ironic humor that no dogs can be seen with the men.

They have learnt from the first time, Will thinks drily. But he cannot bring himself to smile at all.

A large bulked man pushes his way forward and catches Will's attention. Will holds no love for any of the men attacking Hannibal, but the presence of this man send a jolt of guilt through him.

“Will?”

The voice is strong but wavering in uncertainty. Mr. Crawford steps forward both hands half reaching out to Will. His eyes dart from between the Wendigo, who stops in his attack, watching carefully at this new threat who addresses his little one so familiarly. The village men too, stop their attack, as if only now they notice an innocent boy in the field.

Well, almost innocent.

“Will.” Mr .Crawford steps forward, only to stop at the sound of Hannibal's snarl. The man looks back to the monster, every bit as ferocious and deadly as the first time they met. But his concern for Will overpowers his fear, and his eyes move back to the boy on the ground.

“Will, what's going on?”

The question itself is layered.

Mr. Crawford was standing nearby Mr. Mason when Mr. Cordell came to them earlier to relay the news. Dragging the young boy Brian with them. Will had freed the Wendigo and escaped with the monster. Mr. Crawford had not wanted to believe it, surely Will did not do something so bad as that, even affected by the Wendigo as he was. But deep down, if Mr. Crawford was being honest, he is not surprised. He already knew Will went out at night, but he had assumed Will was going back to The Wall. His sudden happy behaviour meant the boy was getting better, the sudden sadness growing within the last few weeks, only disturbance at the Wendigo's roars like everyone else. Looking at the boy now, Mr. Crawford wants to punch himself over his folly.

Will's eyes are round with fear and sadness, shocked to the core, not unlike the night when Mr. Graham was killed in front of him. Will cannot bring himself to lie to the man who took him in and saved him from Mr. Mason the first time.

“I had to let him go...” Will says in a voice small and unsteady, tears falling inhibited down flushed feverish cheeks. “He was hurting him..none of you understand... He's my friend... I had to save him!” Will's chocked words end on a cry, a last ditch bid to make the other man understand.

“Will...” Mr. Crawford's face scrunches with pity at the clear stark pain that is showing on Will's face. Behind him he can hear the shocked mutters and disapproving grumbles of them men behind him.

Whispers of 'Kill them both.” help him focus his priorities. He steps forward again only to be stopped by another snarl from the Wendigo. Mr. Crawford decides that he cannot concentrate on Will's state of mind right now, only his safety. Hands forward, palms open and beckoning he tries his hardest to keep his voice soothing, glancing away only to make sure that the Wendigo has not moved.

“Come away now Will.” Mr. Crawford orders softly. “It's okay. I understand,” he hopes his lies do not sound false. “Come with me now and it'll be alright, everything will be fine.” he takes another step forward.

Will cannot move. Although he was hesitant in going with Hannibal before, he literally cannot bring himself to move towards Mr. Crawford now. Of course that small, shy, scared little boy part of him wants to. Wants to run to the nearest adult, bury his face, and let them make it all safe again. But Will knows better. Nothing will ever be the same again, nor does Will want it to. To do so would be to reject Hannibal completely, and such a thing he knows is unimaginable to him. Nor does he believe in childish hopes that an adult can make it all better. He can sense Mr. Crawford's fear, in his manner, and eyes. Will shifts his body back

from the slowly stepping man before him, and cannot stop a whimper from escaping his throat.

At the sound, Hannibal lurches forward with a small roar and plants himself in front and almost on top of Will. Hannibal's height and long legs, placing Will between them. The Wendigo slashes out at the approaching man and Mr. Crawford immediately moves back. Part of him cannot believe what he is seeing. The monster clearly and possessively, defending Will from them. There is clearly more to this than he first thought. But he cannot help but make sure. Not unlike touching a hot object even though you know it is hot, just to be sure.

“Come with me now Will!” Mr. Crawford's voice is stern and as assertive as he can make it. But he watches with heartbreak as Will shakes his head at him, before shifting to wrap his arms around one of the monsters legs and bury his face into the limb.

To Mr. Crawford's complete shock, the creature immediately drops a clawed arm down to the boy, resting its hand on top of Will's head before snarling another warning. Around him the sounds of the village men's disbelief at this show of unnatural bonding, echoes his own conflicting feelings. Cries of rejection and anger soon rise, as the men brandish their weapons in front of them.

In their eyes, the boy Will is corrupted, and has betrayed his own people.

In their eyes, deadly justice must be done.

Another angry mob to join the many tales of them in ancient historical pages.

Poor Mr. Crawford cannot even bring himself to move. He cannot look away from the sight of Will and the creature in front of him. A naturally straight forward man, this whole thing he simply cannot make sense of in his mind.

See clear what is going on, certainly. Make sense of it? No.

His head buried, Will cannot bring himself to look up anymore. The effort needed much to great to overcome. Instead, he tries to find what slim hopeful solace he can with Hannibal. His bravery and determination, his will and intelligence dashed and chased away. Torn under the stress of all that has happened, and all that is happening. He wants nothing more now than in childish pleading, to turn to the strong and hide himself away in hope that they can protect him, and make it all better. So he sobs and clings himself tighter to the one being in all the earth that he trusts. He can feel Hannibal's clawed hand in his hair, and relief floods him.

Even after their fight and Will's rejection, Hannibal is still prepared to protect and care for him.

In Hannibal's mind, this is indeed so. Even angry as he was, he is calm now when considering Will. The Wendigo scolds himself at his anger. His little one is but a young offspring, and not yet disciplined enough to see the way forward properly. Of course his little one would be scared to face new change, and his own growth and becoming. Hannibal must teach him, and not much teaching can be done while trapped. For now, Hannibal will never let anyone take his little one from him.

“Now, this is a most interesting scene...” A sly and silky slimy voice breaks through the air. Mr. Crawford closes his eyes in despair, Will's head jerks up in fear and dread, and Hannibal releases a hate filled noise, neither snarl nor growl but something in between.

Mr. Mason steps through the line, a nasty grin plastered on his face. Beside him, Mr. Cordell has his crossbow loaded and at the ready.

“This is indeed a very interesting little band of piggies.” Mr. Mason's eyes have taken on a rather unholy gleam. He looks surprising unperturbed at the large creature growling and snarling at him with blood red eyes, veined in black. All the village men around are silent and hushed where once they were vocal. Only Mr. Crawford moves forward. The presence of Mr. Mason prompting him to urgency.

“Mr. Mason...”

But Mr. Mason is having no interruptions this time, not now that this situation although perilous in its own right, has deliciously fallen into his lap. He holds his hand up imperiously stopping Mr. Crawford in his tracks, and silencing whatever excuses or explanations the other man may mutter. His gleaming eyes take in the young boy William and the monster. It is clear to everyone here that the boy and the monster share a relationship. The monster is in front of the boy protectively. Mr. Mason ignores the glares the boy is now giving him and chuckles softly to himself with glee. He can use this...oh yes...he can use this so very well. Just like his papa once told him to. Mr. Mason was very angry earlier this night when he saw the destruction and the danger a fire had done to his beloved pig pen and pigs. But no pigs were harmed in the end. The stupid villagers saved his pigs, and were more than willing to give in and help Mr. Mason rebuild with no cost to him.

Such generosity. Mr. Mason crows in his head.

But this.

By the end of the day Mr. Mason will have finally defeated this annoying monster and bring the antlers back to the holy sect to be glorified and honoured as the one who has the power to defeat the great dark.

And young William....

He will finally have what he has desired since Mr. Grahams passing.

To obtain Will Graham for his own.

Knowing all this as a surety, Mr. Mason holds no fear as he steps forward towards the monster and the boy.

Hannibal hisses a warning. Every part of him hungers and rages, to attack. To finally bath in the blood of the man that hurt him and captured him so. Only the firm grasp of his little one, still holding onto his leg has him hesitate. The Wendigo once made the mistake before of leaving the side of one of his little ones to fight, and she was destroyed by these man pigs.

Hannibal is reluctant to make that same mistake twice. Still, he makes it very clear his displeasure and hatred in every part of his manner.

Mr. Mason stares defiantly, already assuming correctly that Will is a weak link for the monster, and weak links can be exploited. He smirks before glancing down at Will.

“Well, well, well.” he croons “Aren't you a smart little boy?”

Will glares at the man whom he hates with every pore of his being.

In his head, he imagines every word Mr. Mason sprouts from his mouth flicking out and sticking to him like thick oil. Floating like poison through the ears. Will cannot help but give his head a shake and want to rub his arms to try and rid himself of the icky feeling. The only thing that stops him is his grip on Hannibal's leg. Looking around, Will knows they are completely surrounded and outnumbered. All the villagers now have silver weapons of some kind. Will's memory flashes back to when Hannibal was first captured. Hannibal will be no match for all these villagers, not in the state he is now. Will can feel the sticky tacky blood drying on Hannibal's skin, smell the warm iron of it like cold metal. Although he is scared beyond belief, one things shines through him clear. His desire to protect

Hannibal, and see him free and returned back to Wolf Trap Wood. That is the plan, will always be the plan, and Will is still determined as ever too see it through. Will's mind restored, he slowly moves beside Hannibal, and with a disgruntled and furrowed brow musters all the scorn he can manage.

“I'm smart enough to have freed Hannibal from your so called 'holy protections'.”

Will relishes the flash of surprise and irritation that crosses Mr. Mason's face. But it is not there for long.

“Yes...yes..you did. Such a smart little boy.” Suddenly, Mr. Mason's face lights up and his eyes widen at a particular realization and young William's attempt to taunt.

“Hannibal?” Mr. Mason asks curiously “You called it Hannibal did you?”

A stone falls to the pit of Will's stomach as he realizes too late his slip of the tongue. He can only raise his head in defiance.

Mr. Mason however is crowing with mirth and laughter. “You named it! Oh you poor poor child, oh you poor little boy, did you think you could have this creature as a pet? Like one of your straggly little dogs?!”

“He's not a pet!” Will screams in anger.

“No.” Mr. Mason's mirth leaves his face like wiping dirt off an object. The unholy gleam is back in his eyes. He points one long finger at the Wendigo who snarls and gashes his teeth at the gesture.

“No, you poor child. I know this thing better than you ever will. But you've heard my work haven't you? Heard it scream in the evenings?” Will flushes at the memory, his face twisting sickeningly as he recalls nights walking into the cabin and dreading to see what damage Mr. Mason has done that day.

“Oh yes, you do know...” Mr. Mason whispers, all the pieces coming together. “But that isn't all is it? You've been visiting our creature here haven't you dear William?”

Will tries but he cannot mask his facial reactions to Mr. Mason's words. Too tired and worn, too stressed and depressed by the failure so far of his plan to free Hannibal. The villagers rumble angrily once more.

Mr. Mason gives another chuckle, this time out loud. “Oh such a delightful child! So ingenious. When my dear son told me of his scuffle with you one night on my property, I assumed it was you trying to see the Wendigo. I encouraged his little strolls but heard no more of it, yet I always wondered.” Mr. Mason's voice trails off. Will can recall his meeting with Randall that night, and the annoyance at the older boy whom he views as just another obstacle between him and Hannibal.

“Hannibal did you say?” Mr. Mason rubs his fingers together and shows a look of contemplation. “The name of a great conqueror and general of the old times. A fitting name considering. I'll give you credit for that.” Mr. Mason raises his fingers to his lips and smiles once more. “But useless and pointless to do. This thing is not worth a name, it is not worth anything except to be smite from this earth by holy fire and silver.” Mr. Mason's face then twists again, showing an overly concerned and sad expression, a voice pleading and false in reassurance. “You think I wanted to harm this creature William? I tried my best, I tried to purify the creature, for don't I preach that we are all made of the earth by the holy? I tried to save it...”

“LIAR!” Will screams once more.

He cannot believe the complete filth coming from Mr. Mason. His lisp trembles with rage at this man who is the epitome of a true monster, not the Wendigo beside him. At his scream the villagers brandish their weapons and angry cries arise. Sickly consoling, Mr. Mason holds his hands out, palms out, towards Will.

“You have been deceived my poor child. The monster has you in his thrall.” Mr. Mason turns around to the villagers behind him and raises his arms, his whole manner that of the most holiest of men of position. “Do not give up on this poor child my dear friends!” he cries. “Do not turn to the dark and abandon the mercy of the holy light! For we will save this child from the dark clutches of this creature, and bring him into my care.”

Mr. Mason's hands clap, palms together holding in prayer, before turning back to Will. Behind him murmurs of agreement and devoted sheep bleeping show Mr. Mason's manipulative power over the simple minded villagers.

“Help us free you dear boy, and let us ki-... purify - this creature once and for all.” A cry of the villagers behind him seals the deal.

Will can barely breath from the sick sight before him. He gathers up and spits at Mr. Mason.

It does not reach the man....pity.

Mr. Mason doesn't flinch, but smiles at the defiance. He holds a hand elegantly out to Will, ignoring the warning snarl from Hannibal once more.

“Come dear William. We do not wish to see you hurt today.”

Will glares. Beside him he can feel the rage of Hannibal, and this time, he lets it fill him up so they both radiate hot red. Their bond sealing back together, flooding the cracks previously made. Anyone looking can feel the twin power, even if realistic sight shows only a small boy and large creature. This is beyond, and the villagers step back uncertain.

“Go to bloody hell Mason.”

Even Mr. Mason hesitates for a fraction at the venom in Will's voice, at the belittlement of Will calling an elder of the villager by their first name with no honorific. Surprisingly, it is Mr. Crawford that breaks the silence this time. Shocked, angry, and desperate to try and salvage Will as best as he can, to take hold of this overwhelming and out of control situation, he calls out.

“Will.” Mr. Crawford's eyes are pained and desperate. The boy only gives him a glance.

“Will, stop this now.” Mr. Crawford says again as stern as he can, trying to use his power as an older parent figure to his advantage. But Will in no ordinary boy. He meets Mr. Crawford's stare head on.

“Listen to your father William.” Mr. Mason says.

Will makes an uncomfortable expression. He has no wish to hurt Mr. Crawford whom took him in and acted as kind of a father as any. Ten times better than his own father did. But Will's loyalty is to Hannibal now. With a stab of regret, he states dispassionately.

“He's not my father.”

The pained expression that crosses Mr. Crawford's face hurts Will as much as he can sense it hurts other gruff man, but Will cannot take it back. Mr. Mason looks like the cat that ate the canary however.

“No Will.” Mr. Mason says with delightful triumph. “Your true father was killed. By the very creature you are trying to free and protect.”

Will can see the point Mr. Mason is trying to use to win the argument, but Will almost feels like laughing at the attempt. Will holds no love now for his late father. He knows the man did the best he could and there is no resentment and grudge to fester.

But Will had always felt alone...until Hannibal.

Will glances up at his dearest friend. Still lightly snarling beside him, and smiles. He looks back to Mr. Mason who falters at the smallest of smiles still on Will's face. Deep in the inner eye of the mind of Will Graham, he spies a pendulum of deep gold swaying across with a sheen, not unlike at all the moment he first entered the cabin to see Wendigo. Will enters a realm of his own. Peeling back layers of layers of reality from the outside world from each man in front of him, until only truth remains.

His face is blank, and aged well beyond his years. His voice when he speaks, is strangely deep and even, not crackling and broken like it has been the past month.

Puberty.

“You think you see, but you don't Mason.” Will regards the wall of villagers almost one by one, passing each one he knows so well. Mr. Crawford, Mr. Cordell, Mr. Boyle, Mr. Madchen, but all the others as well. So many faces, seen. So many Will has watched and knows. So many that look upon him with uncomfortable superiority. They reject because they do not understand, do not want to understand.

Will lifts his head and regards Mr. Boyle.

“You hate yourself don't you?” Will's voice is clear and deep. Mr. Boyle's face turns red in startled anger and indignation at suddenly being singled out.

“Wha-!”

“You hate yourself because of what happened to Cassie.”

“How dare you!-”

“You failed her.” Each word Will utters is like a sharp piercing stab to Mr. Boyle's inner soul. He attempts to keep hold of his anger in an attempt to stave off the embarrassment and the feeling of being stripped away to be bare bone, but Will continues on. In the same even tone, clear, concise and slightly dreary as if the young boy is speaking from a bored eternity. Over dramatized perception of it perhaps, but the effect is there nonetheless.

“Trying to impress the local village girls, when you were tasked with watching over her. You keep telling yourself over and over that it wasn't your fault. You didn't make her climb on top of farming things, you didn't make her jump up and down to get your attention, you didn't make her slip and fall and skewer herself.” Will cocks his head to the side as he regards Mr. Boyle, now silent and tear eyed, lip trembling. “What makes it worse is that your denial stops you from moving forward even as you say you are. You pretend and posture, and attempt to be bigger and badder but you're not. You'll never be but the same boy flexing meager muscles in front of village girls.” Will finishes his diatribe with a snort. The other village men squirm and shift uncomfortably at the confrontation, at words said which were supposed to be the hidden whispers of the village.
But the boy is not done.

Will turns to another villager in the line. “Mr. Silvestri.” The man in question, a simple average villager turns to look at Will wary and afraid. “You try even harder than Mr. Boyle.

You reach and fail time and again to be more than you are. Every failure another reason to keep reaching for something you will never achieve. You are average, Mr. Silvestri. You moved here to this simple village in hope that you could finally gain glory among the cattle here, but you can't even do that. Stop following and getting in the way of Doctor Sutcliffe, or one day your untalented hands will do something that can't be reversed."

Will turns to another, his mind finally given voice to all the secrets and observations he had kept to himself back from the first time he realized that he could look at a person and know.

"Every day Mr. Lincoln you despise your mother and her overbearing nature." The man in question, glances uncomfortably at another matronly female who is scowling fiercely. "You put on a facade of submissive obedience and devoted loving son, while honestly, you probably wish you could smack her over the head with the sharp end of that spear of yours." The man, as if it would help, stupidly drops the said spear he is holding and puts his hands behind his back. Will notes with amusement that no denial is heard.

"And you Mr. Ingram, simply hate people in general." Black motionless eyes look to Will from a tall neatly groomed man.

"Their look, their touch, their very breath. You simply can't understand them. You can't even bring yourself to touch your own wife, and even more, you don't even care. Blind, deaf, and dumb to her hurt looks and sad faces."

Will then turns to the one person he feels a slight nugget of sadness in disclosing the secret thoughts of. But it does not stop him from saying it.

"I am grateful to you Mr. Crawford, for taking me in when my father died." Will's voice turns softer, a more whispered veil of regret in his speech. Mr. Crawford's face crumples and turns still as stone in its angry anguished expression.

"But I know the truth. You never wanted me. Born from the root of justice and fairness, you took me in because you knew it would make Mrs. Crawford happy, and because your sense of righteousness is clear in all, protection from Mr. Mason. Your attempts at bonding just that, attempts, going through the motions. All you are comfortable with, and tainted from the genuine protective fondness you once had for me when I was still with my father. You can't stop yourself from wondering sometimes if you would've felt differently had I been your real son." Will looks to Mr. Crawford with a self depreciated smile, still needing to reassure the stern crumbling man. "I can assure you it would not have been. I am.....a difficult child. Still, you are a good man. And I am grateful for your care." Mr. Crawford's jaw and fists are clenched tight.

Will then turns back to Mr. Mason, who has watched the whole thing with wide eyed rapture. Will gives a disgusted snort.

"You...you are just a stench on the earth." He says bluntly, not even wanting to delve any further into Mr. Mason's skewed and demented mind. He considers the villagers gathered around him and raises his voice a little.

"So you see. I see everything."

No one moves. Not even sure what they have just witnessed.

Yes, revealing truths can have the nasty habit of making one freeze in stoic, still denial.

Beside the young boy, the Wendigo Hannibal is in complete awe. Eyes drain back from blooded red to a pure shining white like fresh snow, as he beheld his little one in front of him. Seeing aura of marbled gold and black veins reach out to touch the unworthy ones in front. His little one looks so powerful, so strong and beautiful, Hannibal cannot help the softest purr that escapes. Clawed hand reaching out to place on top of a brown halo. Will hears and feels Hannibal's approval beside him and looks up, giving a small smile both terrifying and childlike in appeasing.

Will knows in that moment that he is a fool to think that he still belongs to the village and its people in any way, shape, or form. All that he could ever want is in the woods he loves so much, and in the creature next to him. He will make sure that Hannibal escapes Will decides. Then when he can, he will find his way back to him.
But we have forgotten about the rude man and the mob of villagers.

A sharp swoosh and clap, slow but continuing four times more followed by a hated voice.

“Wonderful!” Mr. Mason crows. “Marvelous! Simply glorious!” He takes a two steps forward towards Will and Hannibal, the latter of whom snarls yet again and pushes the small boy behind him. Will allows this, his momentary show of power wilting under the strain of the situation once more. An ebb and flow of power not yet stable enough to be consistent.

Mr. Mason smiles widely at the two. Corruption and evil nature oozing out of the man's very pores.

“Such a unique and strange bond you two have.” Mr. Mason cocks his head to the side. “It will give me such pleasure to see it crumble for the abomination that it is.” the words are said calmly and carefully, matter of fact.

“You can't have him.” Will says, moving around and in front of Hannibal again. Their protection of each other almost like a dance.

“Now now dear child you can't think to be able to stop all of us.” Mr. Mason remarks in a chiding and mocking tone. Gesturing around him to the mob of villagers of whom recognize their summons and lift their weapons in unification.

“Will.” Will turns to the voice of Mr. Crawford once more. The man looks desperate.“Please. Come here.”

But the look in Will's eye is stubborn and strong. He gives Mr. Crawford no more attention and looks straight into the smirking face of Mr. Mason.

“You can't have him.”

Mr. Mason continues to smirk but they all know it's a Mexican stand off. The only sounds heard are the chirping of early dawn birds. Will only now realizes that he is standing

completely in front of Hannibal, his arms outstretched. He can hear Hannibal's labored breathing and smell his crisp blood behind him. They cannot stay like this forever. Will risks turning his head to look back and up at Hannibal.

“Run.”

Hannibal looks down at him in complete surprise.

“Run. Get away!” Will hisses between his teeth. He can feel in front of him the murmur of the villagers. When no one is talking even at a whisper, Will can be heard.

I will not leave you little one.

Will's face shows his pain. “You have to Hannibal. You have to get away.”

“ENOUGH!” Mr. Mason's shriek startles them both. The holy man's face is livid now and mottled red and white. Will feels with dread that telling Hannibal to run was the last straw that broke this stalemate. Mr. Mason will never let Hannibal go alive. His dread is confirmed when Mr. Mason shrieks.

“Kill it!” pointing at Hannibal.

“No!” Mr. Crawford cries, looking from Mr. Mason to Will. Despite everything and their disdain of Will now, even the villagers hesitate to attack a child. It would be very hard not to with Will still standing in front of the Wendigo.

Mr. Mason looks around him with a sneer. Weak, sniveling little piggies.

Less than ten steps away, Will is begging Hannibal to flee.

I am not leaving you little one.

Will's pleas are falling on deaf ears and actions, as Hannibal now attempts to place Will behind him once more.

“Cordell.”

One name holds all the certainty.

The beefy butcher steps forward with his cross bow, ignoring Mr. Crawford's bellow, and calmly shoots at the Wendigo. The silver tipped bolt flies straight as ever. Will can feel it as it passes, the wind swishing his hair, the bolt missing his head by only two fingers before embedding with a sickening thunk into Hannibal's lower chest.

“Noooo!!!” Will screams in horror, looking at the bolt contrasting sharply from Hannibal's black skin, and holds his hands out towards the attack in vain. Behind him, he can feel and hear Hannibal's angry and pain filled bellow. Sense and touch deep within his soul Hannibal's growing rage bursting forward one more. He does not need to look to see that the Wendigo's eyes are again blood red. Hannibal's roar and Mr. Cordell's first move spurs on the other sheep. They send cross bolts and spears flying towards the great creature. Hannibal thinks no

more. He sweeps Will to the floor with minimal effort, making Will wonder just how much leniency in physicality Hannibal allows with him, before the blooded Wendigo attacks the villagers in horrific and deadly passion.

Blood flies. Screams echo. The entire arena is once more drenched in the darkness of war.

Hannibal is tearing into the villagers with abandon, wrenching limbs, biting and slashing to spray blood. The villagers do their best, but scream in both pain and desperate anger. Sheer numbers allow them hits on Hannibal, however many are hurt by collateral damage from the mania. Hannibal is in berserk mode. Only Will can sense weakness, the sludgy movement and flinging of bodies out of tiredness to get the little vermin away from him. Obsidian skin is streaked in blood, wounds clear and vicious. Will must do something. On any other day he is sure Hannibal could lay wreck to the lot of men. But sheer numbers and the poison of the silver weapons are driving Hannibal down. Will scrambles to get to his feet and lurches forward to do...something, only to be held back by two very strong and burly hands and arms.

“Let go of me!” he screams at Mr. Crawford.

“You can't get in there Will! Do you want to die?! STOP!”

“Let me go! I have to help him! I can't let them kill him! I love him! He's my friend! HANNIBAL!!!”

Will wrenches his arms and screams for all his worth. Mr. Crawford only just manages to keep hold of the fighting lad. Will watches in terror as the villagers start to mob Hannibal. Will knows he does not have much time. He must help Hannibal, convince him to leave without Will for his own survival. Will will find him again, he is sure. Nothing will keep them apart for long.

Will wriggles, waves, and stomps in an attempt to make Mr. Crawford release him to no avail. Finally, in a last ditch effort, he pulls his arm up to his face and bites down hard on the hand holding him. Will tastes the metal flavor of blood and meat as it fills his mouth.

Strange, Will thinks suddenly. The taste is not that much different to his own.

Mr. Crawford yells in anger and pain, but the momentary distraction is enough, as Will releases his victim from his mouth before flinging himself forward and towards Hannibal. The villagers and their weapons he disregards riskily, and soon finds himself bleeding from collateral damage, but his goal reached. He reaches Hannibal who is now on his knees, and desperately pulls away at the chains that have managed to wrap around him. He ignores the whispers and shocked angry cries of the villagers who wish to resume their bloody hunt, but still unwilling to intentionally hurt a child.

Both Hannibal and Will are breathing hard from effort. Will roams his small hands over Hannibal's body tenderly, touching gaping wounds which bring tears to his eyes. Hannibal too, brought back from his berserk rage due to the weakening of his body, reaches up to rest a clawed and bloodied hand to Will's face.

Little one.

Will cannot stop crying. He knows what he must say, what he must suggest and convince Hannibal to do. But despite everything, he does not want to do it. He knows his own fate will make it hard to return to Wolf Trap Wood and to Hannibal. He is sure the villagers and Mr. Mason will never allow it. Plus Will is the only one who may be able to stave off the villagers long enough so Hannibal can escape. The heartbreak of it is, Will cannot go with Hannibal. Even now that he wishes to with all his heart.

So Will cries.

Little one.

“What are you waiting for – ! ATTACK!”

Murmurings of reluctant villagers.

“WILL! Come back here!”

“KILL IT!” spittle flying from an exuberant mouth.

Villagers raising their arms but not quite ready.

Spurred by the noise, Will lifts his head.

Hannibal's eyes have returned to their milky white. Though they appear emotionless pits of death, Will can sense the churning emotion in them. They reflect what he is sure is in his own tearful blue. Will clasps Hannibal's long clawed hand where it rests still on his cheek.

“Go.” he whispers.

I will not leave you little one.

Hannibal is stubborn. But Will even more so.

Tears falling freely once more. “Please...” Will begs “You can't beat them like this...they'll kill you.” Will removes his hand from Hannibal's and shakes his head looking down, dislodging Hannibal's claw. At Hannibal's concerned purr Will looks up again. His face full of bleakness and misery. His next words are chocked and hollow.

“Please.....Don't make me see you die.”

The echo of the fate of Hannibal's previous little one, the white wendigo drives the point home. Hannibal looks up again at the villagers, forced forward by the shrieking of righteous death Mr. Mason is screaming for, they slowly advance. Will looks up around him, time tightening his fear, he clasps Hannibal's claw and his tone is frantic.

“Go to the woods. Stay safe and get strong. Then you can come get me.”

You?

“They won't harm me, not really. Please Hannibal.”

Will stands up and and steps away from Hannibal. As if waiting for an opportunity the villagers surge forward. Will points at the space in The Wall and screams.

“GO!”

The noise Hannibal makes is angry, irritated, and grieving. But no more can be said, and fate has thrown them about to land where they have. Roaring in frustration and anger at how these insignificant beings have beaten him so, Hannibal throws himself away from his beloved little one and towards the strange tall trees.

Will is shoved back to the ground by the village mob as they rush forward and attack the Wendigo's retreating back.

“Don't let it get away! Attack! Attack!!!” Mr. Mason screams, waving his arms rather ridiculously truth be told.

Will feels the clamp of a large hand as it grips his arm tight. He vaguely recognises the presence of Mr. Crawford beside him on the ground, but pays no real heed. His eyes completely focusing on Hannibal as he reaches The Wall. Will's heart sinks as he realises that the hole he created is still not quite big enough for Hannibal to fit through. Maybe if Hannibal were to slowly squeeze, but not now with the villagers right behind him still hitting him with the silver cross bow bolts. Will is both surprised and filled with glorious mirth however, as he watches Hannibal disregard the hole completely, and using sharp claws on feet and hands, scales with almost perfect precision up and over The Wall.

Hannibal escapes. Just like that.

So, Hannibal did not really need all of Will's effort with The Wall at all, Will surmises to himself in a stupor. His mouth lies open in shock at the sudden end of it all, yet he can still feels his heart thumping heavily with adrenaline inside his chest. But right next to it, deep deep inside, Will can feel something growing gloriously bigger by the second.

Just like that.

The villager's too share his complete shock at the implications of what just occurred. The Wall. Their saving grace and greatest protection. If an injured, weakened, and bleeding Wendigo can scale The Wall with such ease, all they believed and trusted is a lie.

They were never safe behind The Wall.

They were never truly safe from the Wendigo all along.

The villagers whisper and glance around at each other in a daze. Broken and shaken, the rising of the sun in the sky brings clarity and clear vision of the destruction that the dawn events have brought upon them all. All around, red stains the dirt and grass, and the stench of blood and visceral surround them, reducing their emotions to that of children, wanting to run to their mothers to sooth their frayed nerves and fears. A sudden scream makes them all jump, startled.

“It's injured! It's weak! We can still get it!” Mr. Mason moves forward in front of the villagers, still waving his arms for emphasis. “Gather everyone alive together! We can finish this!” Mr. Mason's manic look is oh so clear in the newly risen sun.

But without their advantage, of numbers and blind bravery the villagers are done. They shake their heads and lower their gazes in shame and sorrow to the blooded ground. But Mr. Mason will not give up yet.

“Let us go after it!” he cries in an last ditch attempt. But this time one of the villagers speaks up, joined immediately after by a chorus of scared men.

“We aren't going there after that monster!”

“Who knows what it will do to us!”

“Look at what it did to us already!”

“It killed by brother! Ripped him apart!”

“You can't make us!”

Mr. Mason's face twists unnaturally. He knows the villagers will not follow him now, and he is filled with complete disgust.

Cowards.

Mr. Mason's mouth opens, and he is just about to raise hell in his disgust when a sound behind halts him.

It is a strange sound. Human made, slightly husky and breathy, as if the sound is almost forcefully erupting from the vocal cords of the person who is making it.

All eyes flit away and down towards the source. Mr. Crawford too, is completely speechless. Slight horror on his face as he slowly lets go of the arm of the shaking figure beside him. Almost innocent. A gleeful sound that echo's across summoning women and children to peek out from their windows and doors, to check if the horror they just heard is truly stopped and the event over.

Clutching his sides, shaking and rocking back and forth with the widest smile on his face, and such relief and joy in his heart.
Will laughs, and laughs, and laughs.

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Will cannot stop it. After all that has occured from the moment he left his bed, to the moment he stole into the shed to grab the tools, to the sneaking of him and Jimmy, from the first chain

breaking, his first real touch with Hannibal, and all the bloody destruction and death that follows.

Hannibal is free. He is safe, and Will is cannot be more relieved nor happier.

He did it.

“Will?”

A strong man sturdier than rock or stone, Mr. Crawford feels unhinged. Looking down at the cackling boy on the dirt at his feet, he feels a stark icy pit of fear in his belly. He thought once ago that he knew the misunderstood boy well enough. The result of a neglectful and abusive father and childish bullying of those different in nature, more mature than some. Yet now, the man realizes in himself just how much he did not know. Much he let slip by, and turn a blind eye to. Inklings and gut feelings he explained away about Will. But now he knows the truth. Will's shredding words spoken earlier further make denial impossible. Will is certainly not like the others, and although the boy once was one he was always at the ready to take under his wing, he cannot bring himself to even touch Will now, nor care. This shames the once strong man, and he looks down at his feet.

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The atmosphere is full of rust and broken pieces. The villagers emerging from their houses to the most queer and gruesome sight near The Wall. But of course, it is Mr. Mason that once again disturbs the stillness.

“YOU FOOLISH AND EVIL CHILD!”

Mr. Mason runs up to Will and immediately with clawed hands of his own, grasps the still laughing child by the scruff of his neck and wrenches him upwards, shaking him angrily.

“What have you done! You have released that creature! You have allowed an evil to once again prey on us all! You have damned the holy light! You have become a spawn of the dark ones themselves! You tricked me and ….” On and on Mr. Mason spews his rage and if truth be spoken, embarrassment onto Will. Hiccuping at first at the sudden abrupt movement and change of altitude, at first Will can only hang there under Mr. Mason's hands like a misbehaving puppy being shook. But soon, his perception comes back to him and he sneers back at Mr. Mason's face.

“The creature beat you Mr. Mason. You knew deep in your rank soul you could never beat him, nor me.” Mr. Mason's rage reaches his upmost limit and even though his conscience whispers that he is being watched, he cannot help the violent righteousness rise, and he drops Will to his feet only to immediately swing his hand back and back slap the boy to the ground.

“Disgusting child.” he spits, with burning eyes.

Will cannot help the cry of pain at the slap, immediately holding his hand to his stinging cheek, and once again he is only a sore and sad child, tears falling as he cries on the ground.

“Mr. Mason!” Mr. Crawford cries out in instinctual protectiveness. But even he cannot bring himself to help Will up anymore, and he hesitates in his initial move forward. The villagers are both shocked at the behavior of their holy man, and the actions they are trying to piece together about the happenings here.

“Is the creature free?” one asks panicked.

“Are we going to all die now?”

“What has happened?”

“What did Will do?”

Fear and alarm ring out, as well as the beginning cries and wails of grief and torture as the now widowed women see the cruel and bloody end to husbands, brothers, and sons. It is Mayor Purnell that steps forwards shakily, white faced and wobbly voiced.

I might add here that despite his many misgivings and faults, as well as his lack of awareness when being manipulated by the holy man, Mayor Purnell does care mightily about his village and the people in it. So we must not blame him for the results about to follow. For Mayor Purnell contains the superstitious mind and simple manner of all the everyday village folk of this time, and what would we have done any differently in his position?

“This is a sad day for our beloved village,” he reports looking around. “We have lost so much, and now....and now our enemy is back to haunt and hunt us.”

The old man looks around at all the frightened faces, so familiar to him, then to the wrath on Mr. Mason's to the hesitation on his once strong enforcer, to little Will glaring with teary eyes at them all. Mayor Purnell knows something must be done about young Will. The boy never fully settled in the village, always so unusual that the man often moved to avoid the strange child when he happened upon him in day to day life. And yet, he is an old man, and the child but a boy. With a shaky movement, well aware of the pushing presence of the holy man beside him, he tentatively appeals to the boy.

“Do you realize what you have done Will?”

The boys eyes are wary and watchful, uncomfortable to look into. “You have betrayed us by releasing this creature that will wish to kill us all, your village, your family.” Mayor Purnell waits for a response, anything that can bring an emotion of normality to all this mess. He ignores the sounds of pain and alarm that rise from the villagers as they piece together Will's contribution to the tragedy. Calls for his punishment start to rise and swell, calls of fear from the creature also rage, and blame is put solely on the always strange little William Graham. For things that are different are never really accepted and are the first to be targeted.

Although it is correct that Will's actions have brought about today.

Will looks around at the faces surrounding him.

None are friendly. He has no allies here. No creature. No protector. Even Mr. Crawford he can see turns from him. He spots Mrs. Crawford with hands over her mouth in shock. All the people in his life.

All the people he has no care for, yet would give anything to have one of them save him now. Will does not regret his actions this morning. He still feels the sliver of joy at Hannibal's freedom and escape. But at this moment, he has never felt so alone. Even compared to the time after his fathers death. Will remembers the large rock that he and Abigail often looked down from and later on, jumped from in the wood. That feeling of standing on a knife's edge, looking down at a hard floor below that could hurt you if another gives you only a slight push.

Will looks up at Mayor Purnell, and the older man later swears to himself that he can see slight sadness in the young boys eyes, as well as anger and rebellion when he hears the soft reply.

“No.”

Judgement and sentence be damned.

The cry of outrage that roars from Will's response even has him looking down against the onslaught.

For remember dear followers that despite his strong self, Will is still a boy with all the power only a child may hold in the world of men.

Mayor Purnell stands back and prepares to wash his hands of the whole thing, for he knows what voice will now ring more powerful than all the rest as to young Will's fate.

“He must be punished!” Mr. Mason calls out. Cheers of agreement and justice ring out and Mr. Mason smiles gleefully, his lack of control earlier overlooked and his mob of pigs returning to his side. Indeed, Mr. Mason is never so regal, awe inspiring, and in his prime than when he is preaching.

“This boy!” Mr. Mason points to Will on the ground. “Has betrayed us! He has consorted and freed the evil creature to bring wrath upon us! He wishes us ill for he has always been not one of us! Always looked down on us and gone about his strange ways! But we will not condone it any longer!” Spittle flies from Mr. Mason's mouth, and each statement is met with cries of agreement.

Only Miss. Alana, and Mrs. Crawford come forward.

“And what exact punishment are you suggesting oh holy man.” Miss. Alana challenges. “He is still a boy with a boys understanding.”

The young woman turns to the crowd with a natural poise and control Mr. Mason can only envy.

“Need I remind you all of the torture and noise our dear holy man carved out in the Wendigo? The disturbance it created in us all? It is only natural that our Will who is closer to nature in all of us, who has hunted and gifted us his catches in wood and water, would feel sympathy.”

Will lifts his head at his teachers kind words, a hint of hope still present that he may come out of this result with not the worst sentence. Alana's reminder causing a murmur of remembered thought. Alana looks around at the faces and pauses with effect.

“Yes, the Wendigo is real, a creature we only thought of as legend and story,” she remarks gravely, “but that only means that it a animal like any wolf or bear of the wood. It is flesh and blood, and can be hurt or even killed. It can also think as one. It is no wonder young Will would think of its welfare, to let it go unbothered by us.”

Miss. Alana continues in her argument slowly turning the minds of the villagers. But good intentions are rarely rewarded. It takes only one moment for Miss. Alana to falter in her argument, painstakingly looking around for Mr. Hobbs, a man always she knew contained a fondness for Will. But no face is seen, and her rhythm in trying to find more supporters is her downfall.

Seeing her stall and stumble a little, Mr. Mason moves ahead, unwilling to lose the ground and the win he so desperately needs. The holy man may have lost the battle with the creature, but he will not lose the war. Possession of Will would be a delightful consolation prize, and do much to sweeten a sour loss.

Mr. Mason moves forward in front of Miss. Alana and sweeps his arms wide, dramatically taking in everyone there. The movement is so flamboyant that even Miss. Alana is one of the few who take a step back in surprise.

“Yes, yes, our dear village teacher makes excellent points as usual. Her education shows, as well as her compassion for our young, her students.” Mr. Mason's smile is as oily and slick in countenance as his tone, and Miss. Alana narrows her eyes in suspicion.

Mr. Mason lowers his arms and with a head tilted high almost whispers his next words.

“But I do say this. I remind people of young William's past offence in coercing with these creatures before!” Mr. Mason looks down and pinches the bridge of his nose much like Miss. Alana when a particular troublesome student is trying her patience. Such a whimsical expression eases the villagers into false faith even more.

“My son Randall has told me of how of he regularly spotted Will sneaking around my home. No doubt planning all this time to free the creature. I tried my dear friends. I did speak to our dear Mayor, the risk of young William.”

Of course, such statement is further emphasized by a grand gesture to poor Mayor Purnell, the man growing uncomfortable with the sudden attention as if on cue. The villagers start to murmur and whisper their discontent.

“I recognized the signs! The symptoms! That this young one was being snatched away from

us! How he is at risk of turning away from his own people. Drawn to the forbidden fruit, and corrupted by the most evilest of creatures!”

At this statement Miss. Alana snorts her derision, both at the words and Mr. Mason's play. But it is too late for her influence. Mr. Mason turns on her with a narrowing of the eyes.

“You show your disdain Miss. Alana, but you are just as much at fault for this.”

“Me?” Miss. Alana says in disbelief.

“Yes you!” Mr. Mason crows. “For it is you that encouraged it! You that gave young William the book about the creature! You that nourished the dark and encouraged its growth!”

Miss. Alana steps back.

“I was only...”

“No!” Mr. Mason holds his hand out with all the power of a fanatic guarding themselves.

“I alone realized the danger. The sickness poor William contains. Poor young child. I wanted to save him my dear friends for such corruption needs greater address to cure. But they said 'no'” Mr. Mason points to Mayor Purnell, Miss. Alana, Mrs. Crawford, and Mr. Crawford, the latter still shaken and unsettled, heavy as the guilt Mr. Mason is throwing.

“So I respected their wishes. I stood down despite my very faith and soul knowing otherwise.” Mr. Mason's voice grows low and solemn, a distraught look on his features like a mask. “And now it is to late. What is inside festers and grows, and this is the result.” Mr. Mason's arms spread wide over the bloody scene soaking the ground and the bodies churning, drawing flies.

“Look at this result...blood and death, and the evil corrupting. I tried , oh yes I tried. But now...” Mr. Mason draws himself up to standing straight and tall, all the effort of a wounded warrior fighting the last fight. He turns directly to Mayor Purnell, for the old man still holds the power of decision. “Now, you must let me save him.”

The Mayor is greatly troubled.

At one hand he knows something must be done about Will. He cannot ignore the great offence the child has caused, and the events here. He feels great sorrow for the loss of lives of his people, and the carnage done to his beloved village. But still, he cannot ignore the niggling. The tiny thread of fear that he usually ignores when it comes to the behavior and actions of Mr. Mason. The very slight hesitation that gives him pause that he would be instead damming the boy should Will be given to Mr. Mason.

Not salvation.

It is his fanatical wife Mrs. Purnell that staunches the feeling back down. In her flimsy nightdress and covered by her expensive fur coat, she comes up to her husband and places

one bony hand on his shoulder, nail like claws digging in and righteous disapproval on her face. One look back to Mrs. Purnell is all Mayor Purnell needs.

For what man is not a slave to the fury of a wife's disapproval?

Mayor Purnell turns to Mr. Mason and nods.

A sentence made.

Mrs. Crawford cries out but is soon surprisingly smothered by the voices of the villagers.

“You said he is to be punished!”

“Look at what he has done!”

“He doesn't deserve saving!”

“Does he not? Mr .Boyle?” Mr. Mason turns to the man, who steps back from the sudden direct attention.

“You would throw a poor child out into the dark?” Mr. Mason accuses, voice chiding. He knows he must tread carefully to make the villagers forget the gaffe and actions his burst of anger might have shown earlier. “Yes the poor boy deserves punishment but done in the proper way! Right now the child is false. He has no understanding of what he has done. What good would punishment do now to him? Oh no, first young Will must be saved from his corruption, then, and only then will he receive judgement.”

Mr. Mason looks down at Will still on the ground and smiles the smile of oily satisfaction. “And we shall bring upon him all the righteousness of the holy light.” the man whispers. Will glares back but knows it holds no power here. Will gave up that power the minute he sent Hannibal away.

“But first!” Mr. Mason stands tall and addresses the villagers once again. “First we must due our duty and holy right! We must save him and do what is right.” Mr. Mason brings his hands together in prayer before stretching them up and out into the air.

“By the light of the holy grace!”

Some villagers repeat the phrase automatically. Others stand and stare in awe at the graciousness of their holy man, while others simply nod to their neighbors and murmur in tired agreement.

“But what if he tries to go back to the creature? It's still out there!” Mrs. Matchen cries out. More nods of agreement following.

“Indeed, a wonderful point dear Mrs. Matchen. For of course we can't risk young William escaping us and returning to the creature. That would be pointless and create probably another sorrowful day like today, a result like clockwork.”

“Will is safe with us!' Mrs. Crawford cries out. “It is you that didn't kill the creature when we first had it! It is your fault that Will had an opportunity to go to that thing! Will receives all the love and care I can give with all my heart. He is my son, and I will not abandon him.”

Mrs. Crawford looks down to Will and he cannot bring himself to look away. If ever he regrets what his actions have done it would be towards Mrs. Crawford, who is ever a mother to him if he ever had one. Her sadness creating added tears to his eyes.

“Yes my dear lady.” Mr. Mason responds with a soft tone.

For even the holy man knows the power a mothers love can wield. Plus, Mrs. Crawford is loved by many in the village, and a harsh tone may even now destroy the lead in his favor.

“We do not doubt your love nor your care. That which you have given freely and with grace to not only young William but to all of us in this village. But young Will needs more than a mother's soft touch. He needs salvation. That which we alone here cannot give him if we are to go about our lives and watch our backs as well.” Mr. Mason stands in front of the distraught lady with arms open beseeching. “Your care will fail once again to turn him from the dark.” Mr. Mason turns back around. “I will take him to the Great City, as I once suggested. I will take him there to live with other boys also in need of the holy light, and there young William will receive the care and cure he needs.”

It is the sentence Will fears the most, and the one he wanted to avoid at all costs. It indeed is Will's plan to escape and return to Hannibal where his Wendigo is now hidden, and logically recovering in Wolf Trap Wood. All of Will's hesitation in going with Hannibal before long gone. Pegging such hesitation to only residual childish fear of the unknown. In his heart Will knows he belongs with Hannibal. He does not need any of the trappings or advantages of village life, nor the people there. Though he will miss Mrs. Crawford, Jimmy, and Abigail for sure. Hannibal will care for him and show him all the secrets of the wood. Will has no more to fear. Except the prospect of going with Mr. Mason. Not only will Will be unable to return perhaps ever to the village and Hannibal, he knows Mr. Mason might even break him. Will does not have the strength of will that Hannibal has to stand strong against Mr. Mason's ways for long. With these thoughts in his head, the boy starts to panic.

“No! You can't give me to him! He is the monster! You don't know what he will do to me! I won't go there!”

But Will's words are swept aside as the ramblings of a lost and shamed child.

“It is the only way.” Mr. Mason states. “Young Will made a deal with the darkest of creatures and needs to be purified. Sadly, I do not have the power here to do such for the corruption is to strong even for my skills.” Mr. Mason adds, a shockingly humble thing to say for the usually ever powerful holy man. “I will need the help of my own masters and fellow colleagues. Plus Will will not be alone, he will be with the other boys who are also afflicted. They can help each other.”

The last is said with a smirk at Will. The boy shudders, icy fear at even the imaginings of what Mr. Mason and his ilk do to other boys such as Will. He fears he will find no allies there.

“I will take him with me and go straight away to the Great City. And to show my genuineness and trust in this village, my wife and boys will stay here to continue living and setting an example of the way of the holy life. I will even ask one of my other colleagues to return with the men escorting me, so as to further help in the healing and rebuilding of the village after this tragedy. I will not forsake you, but I feel the situation with young William needs my attention more. I will look out for him in the Great City.”

This statement is followed by a cheer from the villagers. Whispers of the kindness, leadership, and greatness of their holy man, even leaving his family behind to save an undeserving one of their own.

“My son Francis will ensure all is well, as well in my absence.”

The tall boy steps forward at his fathers gesture, a smile and gleam of complete delight at the prospect of being in power finally after all this time, as well as the added benefit of knowing Will is finally getting the judgement he deserves. For Francis is ever the copy of his father in manner and values, taught since birth to follow the footsteps of Mr. Mason with all of its skewed and warped ideas of holiness.

“I have taught him well the ways of the holy light, and he is my most prosperous pupil.” Mr. Mason smiles indulgently at Francis who preens in satisfaction. “Ask him should queries about my estate and doings need dealt with.” Francis smiles and bows almost in a mock of respect. Not towards his father, but rather towards the village, and what power Francis will now hold.

“I will do everything in my power to make you proud father, and give example of the best way to live in the ways of the holy light.” he lisps.

But what about Mrs. Mason you ask? Well, please remember that this is an old age time of old aged values, and women like Miss. Alana were a rarity in the outlying villages. Mrs. Mason, so timid and under the thumb of Mr. Mason is never even considered for acknowledgement, in whom the power will go to when Mr. Mason is not there. That goes to his first born son naturally.

“Please,” Mrs. Crawford whispers one last time. “You can't send him away.”

“Mr. Mason is right. Will must go.” Mr. Katz steps forward and pushes his way to the front of the crowd, looking directly at Mrs. Crawford. Will notes that Jimmy is nowhere to be seen and can assume with clarity that Mr. Katz has dragged him home, placing him under the guard of Mam Katz, for Will cannot see the usually opinionated lady neither.

“Will cannot stay here. We cannot risk that his affliction will not spread to the other children as well.” Mr. Katz looks sternly down at Will, and the boy can almost taste the disgust.

“I spoke to my son Brian who told me everything. How young Will has planned to help the creature escape for months now. His hate for the village, and what is worse, is that he dragged my other son Jimmy into this as well! Without care or thought that he is putting his own 'friend' is danger.” Mr. Katz shakes his head. “Young Will has clearly stated his loyalty.

We must think of our own children now, their safety.” Mr. Katz steps back and folds his arms. “My son will be punished for his own actions in aiding young Will today. But I know the fault lies with this one. Jimmy is a rebellious child, he will not grow and learn with young Will here, and his continuous influence.”

Another look down at Will has the boy cower, so fragile and burnt out by all that is going on and the prospect of going off with Mr. Mason.

“That creature may have harmed or even killed Jimmy. Did you even think of that?.”A lip curled in disgust ends Mr. Katz tirade.

But it did not end there for poor Will. Once a hole is made, everything escapes. Always the outcast no matter what he did or did not do. The adult villagers start to move forward with their own tales of Will's faults and crimes. Some true, like when Will placed rodent traps outside the door of Mr. Boyles door. Some half true, like Will fighting constantly with the other children to cause them harm, and siccing the dogs on them. When it was those children who liked to start a fight with Will first, and not Will's fault if the dogs under no order from Will, came to protect him. Some tales completely false, as the Madchen's claiming Will tried to poison the village with poisoned mushrooms from the wood. In truth, Will gathered those mushrooms under the Madchen's request and two had been rotten and foul on the inside. An innocent mistake for a child who was only ten winters at the time. The worse claim shook Will to the very core, and broke something inside to weep and bleed. Mrs. Bedelia moved forward in her real fur coat, looking rather wane and rumpled in the early hours.

“His father was afraid of him.” She states to gasps and exclaims of shock around. “He told me himself during one of our nights.”

No surprised gasps were heard about the latter, nor bothered with.

“He could never understand Will, even as a young child.” Bedelia continued, “Always so different, so strange. Mr. Graham tried but he could never bring Will to heel. Always running off into the woods. Disconnected from everyone here, from even his own father.” Every word is like a barb that digs deep into Will's chest. He knew he and his father never got along, and Will already accepted that he despised his father for his drunkenness and neglect. But Mrs. Bedelia was making it sound like it was Will that drove him to it, and all Will. Added to it, is the repeat of the bad rumours.

“Mr. Graham was a broken man after the death of his wife.” Mrs. Bedelia says sadly. “ I alone know the truth, spoken to me in tears and pain. Will was never a happy babe. Always crying and never settling, never allowing his mother any rest, nor any hope of the blessed feeling of motherhood. The poor woman went mad and sought peace.” Mrs. Bedelia lets a small tear escape and trickle down her high boned cheek. “Mr. Graham was left alone to drink and grieve, both slowly swallowed and devoured by this greedy little beast.” she spits out.

“That is not true!” Mrs. Crawford cries out. “We have no right to blame an innocent babe for the actions of the mother nor the father. We all know the temperament of Mr. Graham. This is unfair and cruel. I have been with Will for many seasons. Kept him in my home and I can say he is no spawn. He is a misunderstood and troubled child to whom bad things have happened.

He needs to see that people can be good and forgiving, not harmful for being unique.” There is great unrest among the villagers. Unfortunately for our dear Will, most lean with Mr. Mason, and the idea that everything is Will's fault.

One of these things is not like the other. One of these things does not belong.

Mayor Purnell stands and hears all of the arguments with a deeply troubled look. But one only need look around at the carnage to see what may need to be done. After all, Will is only one boy, and Mayor Purnell must see to the whole village and the threat of the Wendigo now free to prey among them again.

“It is done.” he says. His voice heavy with the weight of the world...

Well, the weight of the whole village in any case.

“Will is no longer a little boy. Like all boys in the village they must learn to be accountable for their actions, and he himself has spoken that he feels no regret for the lives that have been cruelly taken today.” Mayor Purnell looks sadly at the distraught Mrs. Crawford.

“I will not have him here in the village risking the rest of us.” With a deeper sigh and a wave of his hand the old man washes his hands of it all. “He will go with Mr. Mason to the so named Great City. Perhaps there, they can care for him better than us.”

The verdict is made.

Mr. Mason grins with the joy of a thousands stars, and can only just stop himself from crowing. He immediately turns to Mr. Cordell who nods with an almost equal maliciousness and turns to sprint away to Mr. Mason's abode. For they have planned this day from long ago, and agreed that should it come, to move quickly less the opportunity slip away from them. None notice the rather big bellied man push through the crowd. The villagers are calling out their agreement, while Miss. Alana can only look on white faced and shaken. Horrible thoughts waving through her head at what may become of the quick witted and strong willed Will in Mr. Mason's care, with no way out.

Mrs. Crawford is the only one that still beseeches to those around her. Seeing no friendly faces she turns to her beloved husband in a last desperate moment. Hands wringing, she grasps his coat edges and peers into his eyes where he is still looking desolate to the blood soaked dirt.

“Dear...please.”

Her voice spurns Mr. Crawford to lift his head, but he can only whisper his own grief. For despite anything, Will is his son too.

“Our boy is sick Bella, what else can we do?”

Hearing her whimper, the man gathers his wife to his broad chest. His own tears leek silently from his eyes, and he turns his head away. He cannot bring himself to watch Will get taken away like a rabid animal. The villagers start to murmur and move. Widows try their best to

find the remains of their loved ones to weep over. Older men, too weak to help manually, either weep with the widows doing their best to console or start to shoo away the older rebellious children, who have curiously sneaked out of their homes to the edges of the commotion. The remainder of the men go about seeing to the bodies of the dead.
The pieces of them left anyway.

Will left forgotten by all but one. Mr. Mason steps up to the boy with the wide grin of a demon himself. Eyes meet, and a monster whispers low.

“Now that you are mine, we will see just how deep your corruption goes little piggie. And mark my words, you will never see the light of day again, until I am sure you have been purified by the holy light.”

An ice cold sickness of dread and fear swells within Will and bile crawls up his throat.

Fight or flight.

Will hocks up the bile growing and spits it up into Mr. Mason's face. Using the immediate disgust of Mr. Mason quickly wiping his face for distraction, Will leaps up and runs as fast as he can to the hole still gaping in The Wall.

If only he can reach and get through the hole, then he can be safe. He can be with Hannibal and they can live within the wood together. Arms reach out to grab him and he can only distantly hear the bellowing of Mr. Mason. Dodging most of the grasping hands, twisting, turning, jumping over dead bodies, and smacking grasping fingers away with all the desperation of a wild animal escaping a predator, Will almost makes it to the hole.

Almost.

One hairy hand manages to take hold and seal themselves around his wrist. Momentum swinging the boy around and into another hard body who clasps him to a chest with iron clad arms. Will jumps and swings his legs as hard as he can to be released but nothing works. For Will holds all of a child's strength. Lacking as it is from all of the events past that have tired him.

As the men drag Will back over to a grinning Mr. Mason, the boy screams for all his worth.

“No! No! You can't do this! No! No! Don't let me go! Don't let me go! Please!!!”

The villagers pay no more attention than some quick flickering glances. Too absorbed by their own duties and the dead. In their mind and eyes, Will is already lost to them. With no more presence than the bodies that lie still at their feet, waiting to be heaved and moved to a cart for burning. Only Miss. Alana watches with sad eyes, hands resting on the shaking shoulders of Mrs. Crawford, still in her husbands embrace.

Will knew in his heart that this may be the consequence of his actions should he be caught. He expected at the very least he might be confined, not sent away with Mr. Mason where he will surely die a lonely and torturous death. Will does not want to die, not like that, not by Mr. Mason's hands. He thought he would be brave, and hold his head high. He is not ashamed

of what he has done, and he would do it all over again if he had the chance. Perhaps reminding himself to trust Jimmy sooner so they can tie up his brother.

But Will is panicked. He is scared, and he wants to go home.

“Hannibal! Hannibal!” he screams in desperation. It does not matter that he knows deep down that Hannibal cannot help him, the Wendigo is too weak and should he come they would both be caught. Yet he screams for his only ally.

“HANNIBAL! HANNIBAL!”

Mr. Mason walks right up to the screaming boy's face and sneers. “You sent your creature away boy, remember? He can't save you now. No one can. Except me.” Mr. Mason smiles wide and sickeningly as Will's face goes white, eyes and mouth open wide with horror, and his whole body starts to tremble violently. He wrenches his arms but is held too tight. Two village men drag and carry Will back through the village crowd and through the village. Faces peak out from behind curtains but no one comes out to help.

Soon enough, they reach the gate to the road away from the village, and Mr. Cordell is seen leading up a cart drawn by two of Mr. Mason's horses. No doubt that is where he went off to after a nod from Mr. Mason. Francis and Randall are both leading two more horses apiece. Both boys chuckle and smirk at Will now.

Will wishes Abigail burnt down the horse stable instead.

With both boys inside.

Will is carried kicking and screaming and unceremoniously thrown inside the cart, the wooden floor scraping his hands and legs, the cart is padlocked shut from the outside. Will notes with horror that the cart door window is blocked by precious iron bars, which he grips tightly, ignoring the blood dripping down his hands. He pushes and pulls to no avail. Pressing his face to squish against them he continues to scream.

“Winston! WINSTON!”

He pushes his arm through the gap in the bars and reaches out his hand in hope to see at least for the last time his beloved friend and most loyal pet. To feel the familiar comfort of soft fur, and a wet tongue and nose. But the familiar presence is no where to be seen. Will hopes he will be safe.

Three of Mr. Mason's most trusted village men; Mr. Cordell, Mr. Boyle, and Mr. Nichols go with Mr. Mason to guard them to the Great City. Randall goes with them much to the jealousy of Francis. For the older boy would love nothing more than to see the holy place, and feels much more worthy of that sight than his less holier brother. Mr. Mason does not bother to send for his wife to say good bye, his only thoughts are of the prize currently still screaming in his cart.

Settling himself comfortably while Mr. Coredell gathers the reins, he looks to his right.

“Don't fail me boy!” He directs venomously towards Francis, who startles from the sudden change in his fathers demeanor from the confident pride when addressing the villagers moments ago. But he recovers well, bowing his head with a voice low and humbled

“Yes Father.”

Giving his son no more thought, Mr. Mason turns back and with a quick whip the horses move forward with a snort, the cart rumbling to life. The others in the Great City will not be happy to hear that Mr. Mason not only did not kill the creature, but lost it. However their bad mood may be mollified when they see the pieces still left of the little creature he instructed Mr. Cordell to pack carefully into the trunk at the back of the cart. They will also praise Mr. Mason when they see his offering of young Will. Yes, they will be very pleased with him and reward him most graciously for this offering. For new interesting meat is so very hard to find.

Francis watches them go, ignoring the sneer his brother gives him as he passes no doubt relishing the envy Francis holds. The feeling does not last long as Francis reminds himself that he has the whole village now in his hands by his father. He will not fail or falter, and by the time his brother returns to the village with the three others, he will already have a hand gripping the village tight. Perhaps if he does well, his father will send him to study at the Great City to become a true holy man, and then he will be given a village of his very own to see to with holy fire. With a gratified smile, he turns and walks straight back to the place on The Wall. The poor little villagers no doubt will need a holy man to say prayers over the bodies of their dead.

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Back in the village, Mayor Purnell addresses the villagers with all the shaky confidence he can muster. He soothes them with promises that they will survive this tragic ordeal. They will make a better wall to keep out the creature threat, and will be safe once more.

Nothing like this will ever happen again to the village Maryland.

He promises.

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Imprisoned in the rumbling wagon, Will continues to scream until his voice grows hoarse and drains away to rasps. No one hears him, and no one comes. Exhausted and frightened, he flops to the floor of the cart and curls into a ball trembling. With his ear pressed to the wood, he takes simple comfort in the fuzzy noises of the horse and cart moving underfoot. His eyes burn with pain from his tears that will not stop flowing. His body burns from the scraps,

bruises, and bumps from his ordeal. Sniffling back the snot dripping from his nose, he moves his hand to his face where he sucks on a bleeding knuckle. The metal tasting blood is soothing, and brings up memories of Hannibal. Closing his eyes, he watches the golden light of the lamp that once stood in the cabin move to sweep across his mind, washing away everything else sweep by sweep until only the memory of him and Hannibal remain.

His eyes dry up.

He will never cry for them again.

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High up on a small cliff formation of rocks on a hill, Hannibal the Wendigo watches from beyond the trees of the wood and The Wall. He is battered and bloody, wounded and weak, but still he stands tall and unrepentant. The Wendigo watches as his beloved little one is taken away screaming and crying. Placed in a strange cage smaller than the other beings dwellings, and being strangely pulled along by the grass animals who bow to the beings like the prey they are. His little one's aura is no longer a beautiful merger of colors, but sharp and spiking with distress. His cold monstrous heart beats strong and steady, but inside, the Wendigo is screaming in turn. Every instinct and impulse urges the Wendigo to go back. To leap back over the strange treed barrier and come to his little one's aid. To rend and rip and tear their enemies apart, to save his little one and bring him back to where he belongs in the woods with the Wendigo.

If this were any other predatory animal, the Wendigo might do that. Once again attempt to attack the wretched beings' and the foul one. But the Wendigo is smarter than that. He will not waste the sacrifice his little one gave him, no matter how much he desires to. To not lose his little one as he lost the last. But he is weak, he admits it. He cannot face another fight with the shiny weapons that harm. He must rest and recover deep in the wood where it is safe. Grow strong and deadly again so that he can return to save his little one.

He must also trust that his little one is strong, and so very different from the others. The Wendigo is sure about that. As he survived the foul one so can his little one, until the Wendigo can get to him.

Hannibal.

The name his little one gave him. He will always be Hannibal to his little one, to only his little one.

The Wendigo lifts his head to the breeze and ignoring the wails and pathetic noises of the vermin below him, scents the air. The Wendigo has a very sound and strong sense of smell. and he can clearly seek out the scent of his little one. The scent of blood which makes his own boil in rage that his little one is hurt, and the heady sweet wood musk which makes him let out a short purr despite himself. He is confident that he will be able to find his little one

again after he recovers. Licking his lips and teeth he can still taste the blood of his kills today. The beings did not escape him completely unscathed for their sins. He will taste their blood again he is sure, and hopefully his little one will be by his side watching with pride.

Or perhaps hunting with him.

The Wendigo stands for a long time on the rocks, long after he can no longer see or hear his little one, long after the day moves on. No animal, despite the Wendigo's clear injuries would dare attack, to take their advantage. They can sense the death that will come to them should they try.

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Abigail moves cautiously out from beside a barrel. Time has past and the sun is now high in the sky above her. It bleaches the colour of the blood soaked earth on the ground, turning it rusty and even more earthy. The echoing scent remains of blood and death. No amount of water and soap the village contains will rid that scent for days to come.

She watches hidden as the bodies are gathered and moved to a far distant side of the village just over The Wall. There, they will be burnt in a clearing made. She knows her father went with them with the dogs to protect them from the creature, now back in Wolf Trap Wood and no doubt eagerly waiting to attack them again.

After all, who would not in their position?

Abigail spies that the hole in The Wall has been patched up and sealed to the point of madness and superfluousness. Many planks are overlapping each other and nailed down plenty. No doubt an immediate reaction by the villagers to help create a false sense of security. Four planks would have done the job just as well. How soon the villagers forget that the creature clearly, even wounded, climbed The Wall like a child climbing rocks.

Abigail shakes her head at the idiocy of those who blind themselves to a predator, and almost ask to be attacked. She walks right to the middle of the field and looks down at the blooded earth. She herself has mixed feelings when it comes to the creature. She has since forgotten the strange name Will told her he gave it.

After Abigail had set the fire to the pig barn, she sneaked away amid the shadows easy as breathing. Caught sight of Jimmy with Mr. Boyle whom she heard even by the pig barn, and could not stop the smile and short burst of giggling at the antics. No one expected to see a girl on Mr. Mason's property so no one saw her. She watched as Jimmy and Will moved the creature and again could not stop a bursting noise, this time of surprise and alarm at the sheer size and manner of the Wendigo. Even clearly injured and leaning heavily on Will, it is a thing to behold. She hesitated before following after her friends, wariness making her hesitate in alarm despite Will's previous assurances. But she has always been a girl of logic, and if anything she would not have allowed her friends to face the creature alone when she could

have gone for help should the creature turn.
Hiding in the barrel at The Wall is a decision she makes based on her previous logic. Will and Jimmy seem to have the situation at hand anyway. Only twice she almost leaped out of the barrel. One when Brian...the sneaking cowardly little wretch...confronts them. Abigail herself could have taken the likes of Brian no problem. And again when Will was taken away screaming.

Abigail looks towards the vague direction where Mr. Mason and his procession has taken Will, her dear friend, away in his carriage. Dirty tear marks still streak her cheeks from crying at Will's expense. His screams were like piercing sharp objects to her heart, and only thoughtful logic taught to her at a young age by her father in response to a situation, stops her from running after her friend.

Logic and fear.

Abigail saw the carnage of the creature from where she hid. Hands clasped tight and firm across her mouth to mute her whimpering, tears that do not stop had poured down her face. Her throat seizing up and her head pounding with her heartbeat. As the daughter of a hunter she thought she could handle anything, any sight of an animal in attack.

She was wrong.

Fear also stopped her from leaping out to defend Will with Miss. Alana as the case against him expanded. From calling out Mrs. Bedelia as the bitter smelly old crow that she is, and all the other villagers that are swayed by Mr. Mason like sheep. Not that Abigail can say anything about it. The fear of Mr. Mason. For although she cares for Will greatly, even she does not want to risk the wrath of the holy man. To risk being another chosen to be whisked away kicking and screaming to the Great City, and at Mr. Mason's mercy. Abigail worries, oh she worries and fears so much that she will never see her dear friend Will again. The fact that she hid throughout does not help, and somehow shames her deeply, adding to her sorrow. Yet, she followed Mr. Mason back through the village and watched the cart as it went. Creeping back through the village to the spot on The Wall for no reason other than a vague thought that the creature may be back there for Will, having heard his cries. She creeps past Jimmy's house, hearing him obviously locked up inside. His yells combined with Mam Bev's. She just manages to hide as she see's Mr. Crawford capture Winston, and attempt to drag and wrestle him back to the house. The dog is very agitated, obviously from hearing his master in distress, and Abigail's heart feels like its bleeding anew. Winston spots her and barks out but Abigail remains hidden. Her sadness only reassured by the reasoning that Mr. Crawford would never harm Winston. If anything, he might relinquish the dog to her father, and wonders why he is not there with Mr. Crawford right now helping with the dog.

Now she stands here, where evil has touched the earth or so the old stories would say. Tears start again to fall where she has her head bowed, and she sniffles and weeps. What ifs and things she could have done different flow through her head uselessly and add to her grief. But if her father has taught her anything, it is that once death happens there is no going back, and once a predator commits to the action of leaping forward to it's prey you cannot hesitate and you cannot try again.
She cannot tell how long she stands there crying, stones in the pit of her stomach as she

grieves that she might never see Will again. She wants to hate the creature for what has occurred due to its presence. For if Will had never laid eyes on it then perhaps this would never have happened. But there she goes again with the what ifs, and Abigail gives herself a mental kick.

For never has she seen Will so happy than in the time when he was seeing the creature. Indeed, despite it all she saw as the creature behaved with nothing except gentleness towards Will, even amid all the carnage it created. Never did it turn to harm him.

Will was right.

But that did not save him. For Abigail is not sure how Will can possibly survive Mr. Mason, with no decided time upon when Will may be able to return to the village. She lifts her head to look above The Wall where she can see the tree tops of the wood, and wonders. With the creature free and Will taken away, how will the creature react to them now? Will it attack them mercilessly? Unless they can make a wall big, tall, and strong enough to keep the creature out, there is every possibility that it will climb back over and attack them freely now out of revenge once it recovers. Despite having the precious silver weapons, Abigail does not think the villagers are stupid enough to go into Wolf Trap Wood to hunt the creature down.

There is always a bigger predator, her father told her once.

Surveying around again only a little more clearly and less stuffy from emotion, a glint of something white catches her eye, reflecting off from the now midday sun. Moving forward expecting a fragment of bone from the pieces of villager left, a charming thought but realistic nonetheless. Abigail is both saddened and heartened to see Wills' wolf tooth necklace lying on the ground. Picking it up with trembling fingers, she squeezes her eyes tight in an attempt to stop more unshod tears leaking out at her discovery. She is glad in the end, that she has it. For surely Will would have had it taken away from him from wherever he ends up. Mr. Mason would have made sure of that she is certain.

Gripping it tightly, feeling the tip of the tooth bite into the flesh of her soft palm, she contemplates putting it on for a second, in remembrance of Will. Abigail almost immediately shakes her head in denial, as shame again rears its head. She cannot let herself think of Will as if he is gone from life altogether. He is not dead, merely lost until he returns to the village, and surely he has to return eventually? She will save it for him. Abigail decides with a lift of her head high. Keep it safe until he returns.

“Daughter.”

At the sound of her father's stern and calm voice she spins around, necklace still in hand, and spots him standing between the sides of the village houses, arms crossed. He does not seem surprised to see her there and with one unspoken look between them, she knows in an instant that her father knows or at least guesses confidently, her involvement with Will and all that happened thereafter. Her mother will not be at all happy should she be told. Always wanting Abigail to be more like Molly in behavior and manner. With that in mind, Abigail cannot help herself.

“Are you gong to tell mother?” she asks in a soft voice only slightly trembling.

Mr. Hobbs only blinks, and responds with a short “No.” in reply.

Abigail tilts her head to the side trying to gauge her father's mood with this.

“Are you angry about your tools?”

Mr. Hobbs smiles in a slightly off kilter way. “They have been returned to me unbroken” he replies, and Abigail can sense a hint of amusement in his tone this time. Her eyes widen at her fathers behaviour, but she is not surprised. Her father has always been unusual and strange to some. But to her, he has always been her beloved father. Him and her, always having that connection of understanding which often brings her mother to grieve and despair over. But in this instance, Abigail is glad.
Mr. Hobb's eyes sweep over the entire scene before resting on his daughter.

“Do you see what this is? See what happened here?”

Abigail sweeps her eyes again over the scene following the path her father's eyes took, before landing on herself and the necklace in her hand. She squeezes it once more before looking back to her father.

“I think so.” she replies, voice still soft.

Mr. Hobbs nods his head once before jerking it back in a motion towards the inner village.

“Come.” he confirms by voice. He makes no comment on what she might have clearly clasped tight in her fist.

Abigail smiles in slight relief, her emotional burdens feeling just a tiny bit lighter. Will's necklace she shoves into the pocket of her dress as she walks towards her father, following him back through the village and on the familiar path home. She will put the necklace in a special box full of her trinkets and things she found in Wolf Trap Wood.

It feels right somehow. For Abigail knows that something of Will's is being left behind in Wolf Trap Wood. Plus, a huntress's sense of feeling as her father would say, it tells her that there is a reason things around go quiet before a predator pounces.

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Alas, we are now at the end of the next part of our story dear friends. To tell more in detail of what exactly happens in the village of Maryland, during the time of our dear young Will's absence, would no doubt be tedious and not worth your time hearing. For do you not wish to know more about the Wendigo born of love? About the part our dear Will plays?

Of course you do.

But alas again, a storyteller must adhere to and respect the journey of time made in a tale. So let us wait, not long but a little.
Like dear sweet Abigail.

For Will to return to us again, and the story continue.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry please do not hate me for leaving you guys on yet another cliffhanger.
But this part is integral to the story and has to be done.
Thank you for reading, and I hope you all enjoyed the next chapter of my fic. I will again try and get the next one out sooner than four years haha. But I am also the world's slowest writer, and editing takes so long sometimes.

P.S I'd forgotten just how tedious writing in third person present is. I hope I kept it consistent as possible.

End Notes

Omg, writing in third person present almost did my head in. But I found writing in the normal past tense made the story too factual, and didn't give the emotional surreal feeling I wanted in this story. I did the best I could and consider it a challenge. It's a bit awkward, but I hope people like the different style.
I need also mention that I have nothing against faith or religion. I have made Mr. Mason's faith general and imagined. This is more of the individual's actions and wrongly using religion as an excuse.
The chapters will be long so it will be some time before the next will be out. My apologies. I will try my best.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!